Rise of the Blood Legion

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Rise of the Blood Legion

by Cannibalbaby

Summary

(Title from the album by In This Moment)

"is one of the most violent attacks we've seen in recent times. The death count is still steadily rising. First responders are on scene now at the Regal Morgantown Theater in West Virginia and others from across the country are being sent out to help with containing the assailants. They have yet to identify the group behind the attacks. We are getting social media posts from witnesses on-site, I will warn you, these are graphic."
****
Will is caught in the middle of an unprecedented explosion of the vampire population led by a madman who wants to see their race ruling over the humans. The only one he can turn to just happens to be one of these creatures, but he seems far more interested in the human than the others outside.

~~CURRENTLY REWRITING~~
~~CURRENTLY ON HIATUS~~

Notes

Hey! So this is just a brain child that I've had. I can already tell this is gonna have quite a few chapters with how I've set it up (dear lord what am I getting myself into lol), so bare with me on updates. I don't have a beta, so any mistakes are my own.

I am currently rewriting to fit the vampire lore within the Vampire the Masquerade V20 Roleplaying game. No saying when it will be done.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

> Hey y'all. Don't get too excited yet to see updates here lol... I originally started writing this during the lockdown but was unable to keep up with regular updates when I went back to work. I never forgot about this fic or the love you all showed me during it's posting. Recently I started playing Vampire the Masquerade with some internet friends and I realized that the discombobulated vampire lore I entirely made up for this fic actually fits fairly well into VTM V20 (With a few minor changes). So, I decided to go through and update the existing chapters to fit this lore and hopefully make the story a little more cohesive. I will add the tag after I get the updates done so that those who come here from the VTM fandom don't get confused.
>
> ***I have no plans to add more chapters at this time.***
>
> Thank you all for the love and support and I hope you enjoy!

There was a blinding yet mild mannered sort of quality to the man seated next to him. The sophistication and poise marking him as a man of high stature in social circles, even society as a whole. It was ethereal, the way he carried himself so sure of his role in life, or in particular his role in the Minnesota Shrike case. They've been in the room with each other for less than ten minutes…

And he'd already managed to piss Will off.

Granted, that wasn't extremely hard to do these days. "The eyes are distracting, you see too much- you don't see enough." Will forced eye contact just long enough to make his point. "And-And it's hard to focus when you're thinking, um, 'Oh, those whites are really white', or, 'He must have hepatitis', or, 'Oh, is that a burst 'vein?'" He unconsciously finds himself staring longer into his eyes than he originally planned, seeing the faintest hint of a red tint to the dark brown of his iris, he doesn't miss the smirk that forms crinkles around his eyes. "So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible." He quickly looks to Jack for some help, saying his name as he does so.

He can still feel those dark eyes on his skin as he tries to get Jack to change the subject. He feels like a piece of meat, the way the small smirk spreads on the doctor's face at his discomfort. The subject doesn't change though, instead this ridiculously perfect foreign psychiatrist has to keep going in his frustrating accent.

All it serves to do is piss him off more. First impressions are important, and this Dr. Lecter guy is certainly fudging his. Will's grievance gets to the point that he has to leave if he wants to avoid making a fool of someone (it certainly wouldn't be the doctor with that damn cool

exterior), making a comment about psychoanalysis as he exits with a growl in the back of his throat. His tread back to his classroom starts out as a stomp, but slowly calms as he gets closer. He only has one last class before he can retire to his secluded home and a pack of dogs.

*****(Months later)
"These marks… This is definitely a ripper kill." Jimmy observes sounding assured in his conclusion as he gestures towards a wound on the side of the victim's neck with his flashlight.

"I'm still saying there's some sort of vampire symbology in the holes. And the flowers coming out of them-" Beverly is cut off from her observation by Will, who pushes up his glasses with a groan.

"Petunia flowers. They mean anger and resentment." He sighs.

'The Ripper strikes again!' He groans internally. They've been chasing their tails with this killer since Will was pulled onto the case, way before that too. He has a way of presenting his art that differs slightly every time. There are only a few set things that happen to every victim that separate it from any other killer.

One; some portion of the body is missing, whether it be organs, blood, a limb, or a combination of things. Two; there are two holes in the side of the neck reminiscent of a vampire bite with two flowers poked into the small holes. These flowers usually represent what the Ripper was thinking when he killed the victim or how he felt towards the victim. It's usually not a very flattering view into the Rippers' thoughts. Three: There seems to be some kind of story or message in the way the victim is posed. Whether that be the victim posed like an old art piece or posed like they are offering something, there is always a very precise meaning behind their positioning.

They are grandiose art pieces aimed at the myopic masses in the hope that one day someone will see the true vision he has placed before wanting eyes.

"You've become quite the expert on flowers." Beverly teases with a grin.

"Only the mean ones." He gives her a small snort of amusement before analyzing the body further, his eyes roaming the terrific display. "He never has anything good to say about his victims. They're all pigs, not worthy of appreciation in life. The only way they can see true beauty is in death."

Jack gives him his usual odd look he takes on when the profiler speaks like the killer, so Will easily ignores it. The woman tonight is left naked sitting upon a bench in the center of the park. Will is more impressed than disgusted by the tableau. How he managed to get her here, set her up, and leave without a single witness is mind-boggling. A late night jogger happened upon this body in the park, a small pile of vomit is still in the corner left behind from the discovery.

She is beautiful like this, the thought not bothering Will near as much as it should. Her bright auburn hair cascades down the side of her face, her head is tilted to show off the puncture

marks with the flowers. Her position is set with legs crossed and hands over the hole where her heart should be, the ribs placed back where they are supposed to be but the skin cut away to make room for more flowers to be tucked into the intercostal spaces. These flowers, however, are from the local bushes, there are visible snips on the plants where the ripper took the flowers directly from the surroundings.

He can see in his head how the Ripper did it, feel what he felt at this annoying scrap of a woman, and he hasn't even dove into the mindset. The pendulum has yet to swing, but still, he's able to see it so clearly. He has spent so much time in the Ripper's mind that he wonders where the blurred line between the two lies. The only difference is that Will has yet to kill, other than out of absolute necessity in the case of Garret Jacob Hobbs.

"It's definitely him." Will looks to Jack, his veins thrumming with adrenaline and satisfaction from the feeling of the kill in the back of his mind as if by his own hand. It makes him scarily still, calm before the storm, the predator waiting before the pounce. It's the most control over his nervous ticks and shy demeanor he ever has anymore. The only time he is truly one with himself.

Jack nods and calls to the others to finish getting the scene cleaned up, giving Will permission to leave as well. As soon as the words are out of Crawford's mouth, Will is quickly trudging back to his car. It's then that he realizes where he is, just on the other side of Baltimore is the good Doctor. He checks his watch and decides an early morning visit might be in order. So, instead of driving all the way back to Wolf Trap, he goes across town and is happy to find no other cars parked in front of the office. Dr. Lecter always parks in the back.

He walks up the steps and knocks before checking the lock to see it’s not engaged and enters the waiting room, nobody inside. He knows that his arrival was announced when the door opened. The doctor has some secret way of knowing exactly who is in his waiting room at all times. At one point Will wondered if there might be a camera, but his careful perusal of the rooms during his previous visits has come up empty.

Just like Will knew it would, the door to the inner office opened a moment later. "Will, what a pleasure. Please, do come in." He steps back and gestures to the room.

Will passes by him, perhaps a little closer than he meant to, into the room, making it a few feet before stopping and turning to his host. "I know the sun isn’t even up yet, but I was in town and thought I might stop by. I hope I'm not intruding."

Hannibal gives a small smile. "Of course not, it's always good to see you. As luck would have it, I happened to pack a bit extra for breakfast. Would you join me?"

Will shakes his head. "I'd hate to eat your breakfast, Doctor."

Hannibal steps behind his desk, pulling out the cooler and setting out two servings. "Nonsense. I packed extra due to an early appointment. However, they called earlier in the evening to cancel and I forgot to put the extra back in the refrigerator before I left home, so I have more than I could possibly eat on my own. It would help me greatly to not have it go to waste."

Will sighs and joins the man at the desk, pulling one of the chairs from the corner table over so that he can sit across from him. "They called last night? I thought you had a twenty-four-hour cancellation policy?" He questions with a snide smirk.

Hannibal gives a small smile as he removes the lids from the nice glass Tupperware containers. "I do, as per the agreement for my care, if she breaks that policy she forfeits the usual cost of our session, regardless of if she should appear." He sets one in front of Will first, then himself, passing the other man a fork before taking his seat. "She was made fully aware of the policy and apologized profusely over the phone."

Will gave a small smirk as he took a bite of the sausage, humming in pleasure at the delicate french toast and thinly sliced meat with the tart red sauce drizzled over the top. "Now I understand why not many miss their appointments with you, nor miss your dinner parties. What is this red stuff on top?" He asks as he takes another bite.

He can see the pride in the doctor's eyes as he watches. "Raspberry syrup. I make it from leftover Raspberry jam."

"It goes very well with the meat." He compliments again.

"So, what brings you to this side of Baltimore? I'm guessing it has something to do with the sirens I heard last evening?" Hannibal asks as he calmly eats his meal, his gaze lingering on the man.

Will swallows before responding. "Yea. Ripper kill in the park a couple of miles from here."

Hannibal looks to Will with a bit of shock. "In the park, out in the open?"

Will nods. "Yep. No witnesses, no camera footage. One minute there's no body, then the next there's a naked girl on a park bench." He shifts in his chair, setting down his fork so he can gesture with his hands. He notices Hannibal set his down so he can listen attentively as well. "There's a- an ethereal feel to it, like the one who's doing this isn't normal, I mean…"

"What he's doing isn't humanly possible." Hannibal completes the thought.

"Right. There are things at these crime scenes that should be impossible for a human to accomplish and not get caught, like leaving a body on a bench and going to pick flowers to stick into its empty chest cavity. I can feel it when I look at the scenes, there's this underlying power that's thrumming just below the surface-"

Will's thought is stopped by a ping from his phone. He apologizes and pulls it out. Just as he goes to unlock it he hears the soft vibration of Hannibal's phone in his jacket pocket. They share a confused look as Hannibal pulls his out as well and they both open the devices to see an identical text from Alana telling them to turn on the news.

"You don't happen to have a TV hidden in here somewhere?" Will jokes.

Hannibal opens a drawer on his desk and pulls out a medium-sized tablet. He quickly opens the news website and opens the Livestream of the breaking news story, their meal now

forgotten. Will brings himself to his feet and circles the desk, propping his hip against the top to watch the screen over the doctor's shoulder. A middle-aged woman with light (obviously not natural) blonde hair is at a desk, a set of papers in her hand as she speaks to the camera.

"-is one of the most violent attacks we've seen in recent times. The death count is still steadily rising. First responders are on scene now at the Regal Morgantown Theater in West Virginia and others from across the country are being sent out to help with containing the assailants. They have yet to identify the group behind the attacks. Southeast Traffic on 79 and 19 into Star city has been closed off and rerouted as far back as Pursglove. 119 north has been rerouted as well with the southern travel lanes remaining open for evacuations.The following areas have already gotten the orders to evacuate their homes. Star city, Sun crest, and residents of the University. South of the Monongahela River, Granville and Westover are also being evacuated. We are getting social media posts from witnesses on-site, I will warn you, these are graphic."

A few images flash across the screen. The images of hundreds of people flooding out of bars, late night restaurants, and shops flickered across the screen. Fear and horror was still obvious even on their blurred faces. A video angle showed another set of people attacking these escapees, either with gnashing of large teeth and claws or makeshift weapons like bats and crowbars. Blood spurts from necks and limbs and all Will could do was look at the small device in horror. The images dissolved into the corner to show the woman at the desk again, her face a ghostly pale in shock.

"Reports from witnesses are calling these attackers 'The Vampires' with their preferred method of attack to be similar to those of the fictional creatures. There are also reports that bodies of those believed to be dead have risen to join the attack. The CDC has been contacted but we have not heard any statements from them. Local law enforcement has yet to identify a leader of the violence or if this is even one cohesive group that was able to coordinate on such a large scale."

"Jesus." Will groans and looks at Hannibal, who is sitting still as a statue watching the screen. For a moment he's not even sure he sees the older man breathing. He's about to question the doctor, but his attention is brought back to the screen at the familiar name of the town where he stands.

"-into the Baltimore area. Residents are advised to stay inside and lock any doors or windows before getting somewhere far from any entry points. This wave of violence which has been steadily traveling over the nighttime hours will likely be moving through these areas in the next couple of days or so. After some investigation, this attack may be connected to similar violence further north along the coast. These people seem to become far more active at night and far more dangerous as well."

"I need to leave." Will is about to move to grab his things but is stopped by the hand on his shoulder. When did Hannibal have time to move, and pause the broadcast while he was at it?

"I really must insist you stay. It's far too dangerous for you to go back to Wolf Trap." Hannibal insists softly. There's a small concerned frown on his face, his eyebrows furrowed in it as well, but his eyes (which Will looked at mostly out of surprise at his sudden stance) had a dangerous red glint in them.

"You need to head home Hannibal, and advise your patients not to come in as well." Will falls serious as Hannibal slowly lets go of his shoulder. Will can physically see the fight leave the man, disappointment and worry heavy in his eyes.

"Do be careful Will." He resigns as he walks Will to the door. "Please call me when you get home, it would make me feel much better knowing you're alright," Hannibal asks softly.

Will gives a quick nod. "Thank you for lunch, Hannibal. You should be expecting my call soon." With that he leaves, quickly jumping into his car and speeding towards home.

Hannibal sighs and begins to pack away the Tupperware as well as his other things. This did not go how he expected, should the truth be found out it could cause a public uproar. A repeat of the catholic witch hunts does not sound appealing, though watching everyone turning on each other as they had back then could be entertaining to witness.

He sighs as he opens his appointment book and begins to dial some numbers. "T'will be a fascinating evening indeed."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Updated chapter to fit vtm lore

Holy crap I've only put out the first chapter and I've already received lots of love! Thank you so much! I've got a few chapters written out already, but I've been neglecting posting them because I've just hit a monumental sized writing block 😭. That's okay. I'll space out the chapters I've got while I attempt to tunnel through! Thank you all so much and I hope you enjoy this next chapter!

Will is going faster than he probably should be, but he has fallen so far into the recesses of his mind that his body is completely on autopilot. He's thinking too hard about the news, what was said about the method of the kill, and how those images gave his imagination just enough fuel to feel that thrum of anticipation. It's not like the ripper, this pleasure is different, so is the power behind it. There's still an odd, almost unnatural power behind it, but not anything like the taste of the Ripper's raw strength in the back of his throat.

These kills are purely for fun, a deep-seated desire to destroy, and a hunt for food. He doesn't have enough info to speculate factions or groups, but an attack at this large of a scale has him concerned. They are out here feasting on the flesh and blood of civilians like monsters, and apparently there are those who were thought dead that have joined the group. It's messy and chaotic in a way that points to multiple leaders and not just one. But who or what are these people to go through ravaging towns down the coast like this?

Will returns to reality when he puts the car into park in his driveway, he quickly rubs his eyes with his palms before turning off the vehicle. The sun is just about to crest over the hillside, soft hues of oranges and pinks lighting the sky. He's about to slide out when he notices the door to his home is cracked open. There are no dogs milling about the yard, and he doesn't hear anyone in the house. Will reaches carefully for the gun on his hip and pulls it from the holster, warily sliding from the vehicle and creeping closer.

A quick scan of the area lets him see that there are no people outside to jump him, so he swings the weapon up and pushes the door open enough to enter the home. There are no lights on, and even though it's the early dawn he can't see very well since the curtains have been drawn shut as if to ward out the coming sun. He notices the dogs huddled into the corner, they don't dare move out of fear of whatever must still be in the house for them to be acting this way, small whines and growls echoing throughout the pack in dismay.

Rounding into the kitchen, he follows the cold metal in his hand, letting it lead him across the familiar floor plan. What isn't familiar, is the slamming thunk sound of something metal, most likely a frying pan, hitting the back of his skull. His head slams into the wall and he

falls to his knees, the gun sliding across the floor. He struggles to gather himself enough to be able to peer to the side through his curls to see the large toothy grin on the man's face before the assailant pulls the pan back and swings again.

Those teeth looked far too large to be human.

*****

'The number you are trying to reach is currently unavail-'

Hannibal sets the phone down in the passenger seat with a frown. An hour and a half is more than enough time for Will to make it home. He's rather proud of his ability to wait that long as it was, but now his concern for the boy is growing. Outside his windshield he can see the cloud filled sky glowing a fine orange as it reaches golden hour, the psychiatrist feeling the pull of sleep after his long night awake. The only thing keeping him upright is his concern for his friend. Hannibal can’t find it in himself to question why he is so possessive of the detective, he can only focus on getting there and finding him safe regardless of what consequences come after.

He's only a few minutes from Will's house now, a deep call for violent recompense in Hannibal's eyes should something be amiss. On a lonely road, he picks up his speed, knowing everyone will be too scared from the news to be out driving. Clouds gather tighter overhead, heavy with rain and thunder building inside of them.

His anger deepens when he notices the open door, the empty vehicle also with the driver door left ajar, and the lack of dogs. The air is growing static from the storm, a bad feeling traveling down his spine as he inspects the outside of the home. He can smell something metallic that coats the back of his throat in an uncomfortable way that causes him to clear his throat. When he enters the house the first thing he notices is the smell of blood, Will's blood. That sets a rolling boil of emotions through his stomach and he gives a soft growl from under his breath.

Through his racing thoughts and mounting temper, he hears a quiet whimper from the corner. He quickly calms himself and follows the sound to the kitchen where the dogs all lay huddled together, some shaking and others growling. He gives a soft whistle and kneels, some of the dogs who recognize him quickly approaching him.

"Where has your master gone?" He asks the large brown dog with splotches, Winston his mind provides.

The dog sniffs the air, walking to the corner of the doorway and sitting to mark the area, his eyes locked onto the wall. Hannibal stands and glances over to see a small splatter of blood along the wall. Hannibal collects some of the still not quite yet dry blood onto his finger. "It happened only a few minutes ago." He observes quietly before placing the finger in his mouth. He lets out a content hum of approval.

‘Dear William, you taste truly exquisite’. He thinks to himself pleasantly. Hannibal looks back to the dog, who he notices is giving him a disapproving head tilted look. "Hush now." He scolds lightly before looking at the others. They've begun to slowly detach from the

amoeba they've formed in the corner, still reserved but not as terrified as before with a familiar face present.

He turns to Winston. "Can you care for them? As for the moment you must take charge as leader of the pack."

Winston gives a small lick to Hannibal's hand. ‘Find him’ it says. Hannibal can understand Will’s fondness for this particular creature, he shows great aptitude for leading the pack. If only he could understand the hound but Animalism has never been of great interest to him. He’s always left that particular skill to those who find use of it, he certainly has never needed it.

Hannibal offers a nod before leaving the dogs to regroup. He carefully walks around the house, trying to figure out the assailant's path, casually laying out the dog’s food in the kitchen for the time being. The interlopers were looking for something. He notices a few books thrown to the floor, drawers were gone through, even the agents’ bed was overturned. There’s one pattern with all of the things that are out of place, the books, papers, and knick-knacks were all gifts from Hannibal. They're looking for him.

That makes him livid that Will is now involved in whatever crack scheme this deficient thin-blood has half-formed, but he keeps himself in check for the sake of not scaring the dogs any more than they already are. This scum will pay for this, a reckoning is on its way.

He’s able to catch Will's familiar bloodied scent and follows it through the door back outside. Once outside he takes a deep breath through his nose, it's been far too long since he's had to track his prey. It sends a thrill of the hunt through his veins as he looks out towards the footprints across the yard, rain beginning to fall across the meadow. He's not far.

*****

Will can feel the chill of the cold concrete beneath his knees, the blood on the back of his head cooling on his skin, the slowly warming metal of the shackles on his wrists, the strain of keeping his arms behind his back, and an invisible weight on his shoulders as if the air itself is weighing him down.

"Stay down, kine." A voice growls when it notices Will waking, though he’s extremely disoriented.

Will tries to look up, barely able to lift his head more than enough for a quick glimpse through his lashes at the man. He's tall, slim, and there's a sneer on his face. Will sees him walking over and drops his head back down just as he connects his boot with his shoulder, pushing his face to the ground, minuscule gravel digging into the side of his face.

"I said stay down! Fuck!" He growls before turning and stomping off angrily. He sighs before turning back to Will. "Who is It? Must be pretty strong? An elder, probably. Is he a cami bitch? It’s not often they step down from their ivory tower to do anything other than shit on the rest of us."

Will doesn't respond other than a small groan, so a hand from somewhere behind clamps into his hair just above the injury and yanks his face up, making Will whimper with pain. "I-I don't k-know what you're talking about." He groans out.

"Yes, you do. Has he been feeding off of you, you a little blood whore? I know there's another like me somewhere around here so quit fucking lying!" He shouts angrily as he stomps closer.

Will watches the man carefully. The light of the room is dark, a few candles scattered, and a few people around the edges of the large room as well. The room itself is probably about the size of Hannibal's office. Hannibal.

God, Will hopes he's safe. He wouldn't want anything like this to happen to the older man, though this is nothing like the graphic newsreel made him imagine. Will knows he didn't call, so the older man might go to his house to look for him. Maybe he'll call Jack and they can send a search party after him. That would be great, but it would take time which he isn't sure he has much of at the moment.

He brings his attention to the present, the captor in front of him is practically seething. His face (even in the dull light) looks pinched in anger. It's similar to a small child throwing a tantrum, the idea making Will smile with blood on his lips.

"The fuck are you smiling about?" His captor asks with a kick to the gut, the other person's hand dropping Will to the ground again, chains rattling with all of the movement. "I need a name, now. I'm sick of having to give the freshies the tutorial on the basic shit and wait for them to get caught up with the program. Our last hunt got too messy and I lost too many bodies. I know you've had an antitribu there. Tell me who the fuck I was sensing in your house and maybe I'll kill you quickly!"

There is a loud thud that sounds to the right of Will, a door probably, followed by a low (but brighter than the light already in the room) glow flooding in, a shadow stretching across the floor. Will is in too much pain to look up, but the shadow on the floor is too familiar not to know it. The black shadowy humanoid figure with large antlers and claws that imposes on the room itself is a shape Will could recognize anywhere from his dreams.

"H-Hannibal." He groans out tiredly, his eyes closing with relief. Though he pauses as he thinks, 'What is he going to do? Where is the backup?'

"Oh, is that his name?" The crazed attacker asks before even giving Hannibal the light of day. He looks him up and down with an unimpressed sneer. "Who's the old man-" He goes to step towards Hannibal but stops in his tracks. His eyes blow wide before his knees go shaky and he falls as if in supplication in front of him.

Hannibal gives a soft sigh, his voice steady with a hint of disappointment. "Please excuse my rather rude entry, but I find it only fair after all you've done to poor Will and myself."

Will notices that the man is shaking on the ground as if in absolute terror. Will's stomach still hurts from the punch, but he's able to force himself to sit up enough to see what's going on and pull a decent amount of air into his lungs. The air itself feels cold and static charged.

Hannibal stands as regal as ever just a few steps from the entry, the captor on his knees several feet from him. There is a foggy darkness that seems to swirl throughout the room, the low light provided by the candles in the room go out one by one until only a handful towards the edges of the room are still lit. The men and women around the room have their heads bowed before him, their backs are pressed to the walls, their hands folded in front of them, and their eyes dare not leave their feet.

"Han-" Will tries to speak but is stopped by a rough spasm of coughing that requires him to steady himself by letting his forehead fall to the cold concrete.

"Dear Will, I'm glad to see you still intact, mostly." Hannibal looks to the man behind the damaged man who quickly pulls out the key and begins to unlock the shackles, not once looking at either Will or Hannibal.

"You idiot! Don't-" The captor stops as he chokes, blood splattering from his lips at Hannibal's feet.

"I've heard more than enough from you." He chides with a small glare as Will stands up, shrugging off the key holder's hands with a quiet growl once he gets his feet under himself.

Will's walk is slow and he limps on the right side. His arm is protectively slung over his stomach and he refuses to let the key holder touch him again. He practically falls into Hannibal's arms, the man easily catching him.

"Oh Will." He coos softly as he gently pulls him close to his chest and strokes the hair from his face. "You need to rest now, when you wake all will be better."

Hannibal moves to slide his hand over Will's eyes, tiredness sinking deep into the injured man's bones. "N-no." That word makes Hannibal still. "I w-want to see." His words are soft with sleep as well as the exhaustion from his wounds, blood undoubtedly soaking into the older man's fine suit.

Hannibal removes his hand and looks upon his favored human with mirth filled eyes. "Are you certain?" Will gives a quick nod and meets Hannibal's eyes which flash a deep blood red. "You are truly magnificent. Can you stand?" Will nods and puts his feet underneath himself, having to fight the urge to just stay there in Hannibal's arms. Hannibal doesn't let go but moves so just a simple arm is around his waist pulling Will close. The bloodied man can't find an issue with the situation, finding comfort in the solid grip as they both look down upon the groveling man.

"You're like me, yes… Yo-you're the one I sensed at the house! What are you-" The man on the floor in front of him hisses as his throat convulses again.

Hannibal looks down on him with growing amusement. "You are so freshly turned, you've not been taught of our kind. What happened to your sire, to leave their unknowing fledgling behind so vulnerable?"

"He killed her," Will comments with a frown. "He killed her because he's so hungry for power." Will can see the pitiful story written in his features, that longing mixed with anger

and resentment for his station. Will has been learning more and more since he woke, watching him and hearing his words have revealed much more than the thin man would want.

"Ah, that would explain it." Hannibal nods, giving Will a proud smirk.

The man below glared at Will. "How the hell…"

"It's a magnificent gift bestowed upon my dearest Will. Even the kine can have extraordinary abilities. I've seen many in my time, but none as beautiful as this one." Hannibal praises. "What sect do you fight for?" He asks when he turns back to the young man.

"S-Sabbat." The pest on the ground stammers.

Will looks around at the others in the room, all with heads bowed and hands folded in supplication for mercy. They wouldn't dare breathe too loudly, let alone move out of turn. "These others here. They don't work for you, not originally. T-they are part of the same… sect? They worked for the girl you killed, but after you killed her they went under you. They know what's going on, you and I seem to be the only ones out of the loop." Will observes, feeling the grip on his waist tighten a minuscule twitch.

Something dark and wriggling pushes through the man's back, Will wondering if that crack he hears was a joint or a bone. Blood spews from his mouth as he gives a small pitiful whimper.

There are a few shocked gasps from those around the room, a couple of them falling to their knees with hands folded to silently beg for mercy. Hannibal sees the surprise in Will's eyes before turning to the insolent bug on the floor. "A particular trait of our kind is the link between power and age. No matter how much you fuel your feeding frenzy, at your neonate age you could never have a chance of doing something as foolish as entering my domain without my knowledge."

Will can hear the quiet pleading of one of the kneeling women along the edges of the room. Her voice shudders as she speaks of "no choice" "elder" and "forgive us".

Hannibal looks around the room. "You all are welcome to leave this… Pig's service for mine so should you choose." He says with a sneer. "Should you choose to remain with him your fate shall be synonymous to his." The blade in his voice sends chills down Will's spine. "You are excused."

Will isn't at all surprised to see every single person lining the perimeter leave to wait outside for their new master, they would be dead should they not comply, the danger dripping from Hannibal with gusto.

"Traitors." The busted man below them spits at Hannibal's shoes, falling just short of dirtying the leather.

"Dear Will. You have suffered much tonight. Tell me, what would you like to see done with him?" He asks with slight amusement in his voice. Will can see this is a test, he asked to bear

witness, but a lowly bystander he won’t be. Hannibal will not allow him to become a passive onlooker, he’s too far in now.

"He should suffer like the worthless pest he is."

The smile that stretches over the older man's lips is like nothing Will has ever seen before. His face lights up in the predatorial way you see on a large animal before the hunt. His large, sharp teeth on full display and the tint of red in his iris bleeding out into a deep crimson red. "You never cease to mystify and amaze, my dearest Will." He caresses the younger man’s cheek with something akin to reverence.

"Does he taste as sweet as he smells? I've heard the ring of his blood all night." The one on the floor goads, Hannibal stilling with a growl.

Will isn't even able to feel the movement, let alone see it, but one moment Hannibal is gazing into his eyes and the next he has let go of the human and is holding the man up by his throat. A low growl is rumbling deep in his throat, loud enough for Will to hear it. "Hannibal-"

"I feel that perhaps death might be too easy of a punishment. This insolent fool does not deserve a swift release into the afterlife." His voice is a scary calm, the kind that you know nothing good will come from.

"He kidnapped me and beat me for the sake of information and amusement." Will glares at the whelp before meeting Hannibal's eyes.

"Shall I return the favor?" Hannibal seems amused by the suggestion.

"Ten fold."

Will can feel the adrenaline in his veins. He's seeing Hannibal's act through his own eyes and it's a thrill he never expected. Nothing his imagination could conjure comes close to what he is seeing now, the raw ferocity the normally controlled psychiatrist is exuding is all consuming, sucking him into the darkness like a blackhole, he is barreling towards it with no will nor way of stopping it.

Hannibal twists his hand, the man's head cracking loudly and his body slumping. "Paralyzed with no way to rid yourself of the pain." He smirks as he drops him easily to the ground with a thud, the man groaning in agony.

Will limps carefully to where his monster stands as he watches Hannibal looming over the pitiful man. He feels overwhelmed by the beauty of it all, his eyes starting to feel heavy as his body begins to catch up with his brain. The last thing he sees is the red of Hannibal's eyes looking into his own full of admiration before passing out.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> **Updated**
> So I have never had a concussion myself, but I know some basic medical stuff for checking responsiveness so I just kinda went with it 🤷‍♀️. I've made so many changes to this chapter as I've been writing this story Oml. It's one of the reasons it's taken so long to post it. I think I'm okay to post it now, so I guess we shall see if I have to make any other changes... Ew. Hope you enjoy.

Will takes in a large gulp of air as his eyes fly open. His heart is beating rapidly in his ears and his stomach feels bruised. He grunts in pain as his body attempts to fight the shocked tension of his sudden waking. Then his brain catches up, *this isn't his house.*

"Hannibal…" He mumbles out loud when he recognizes the room. Hannibal's house, his bedroom.

"Will, I'm right here." A soft, accented voice says from beside him. There, in the chair that's been placed next to the bed, sits the man himself. His features are back to being hidden behind the mask, contorted only in concern and not like that of an angered beast.

"Hannibal-" Will coughs, not realizing how dry his throat was before.

Said man quickly sits Will up just enough to take a few sips of water from the glass Will hadn't noticed was next to him. He clears his throat once before trying again. "What happened?"

Will takes a moment to notice how dim the room is, not much light emanating across the space, the only source a small candle on the bedside table. It's gentle on his eyes, which sting a bit if he looks too closely at the flame. Hannibal gently sits on the side of the bed next to Will's hip, carefully looming over him just a bit.

"What do you remember, Will?" He asks quietly, keeping his voice low. "Do you remember what happened after you left my office the other day?

"Uh, I drove home and I-I was attacked. When… When I woke up he had me chained up in some basement. He wanted me to tell him something about… someone feeding off of me?" He shakes his head, which only makes it hurt more. He gets a gentle hush and a hand on his forehead for his troubles.

"You have a concussion, you need to lay still. Please, keep going. I need to make sure you didn't lose any memory." Hannibal quietly scolds. His cool touch feels amazing on Will's skin.

"He was talking about the people he kept finding not being good enough. He-he wants people to join him, wants you to-."

"Will, I'm not going anywhere." Now he has two hands over his cheeks. His eyes directly in sight of his own. "You need to keep going. What happened next?"

Will takes a second to search his eyes. "You-you came in, you saved me. You wanted to knock me out or something, but I stopped you… The-the guy-"

"Will not be a problem." Hannibal responds with a small smile. "He is hidden far away, he won't hurt you anymore."

Will closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, his hand slowly raising up to rest against Hannibal's side against his ribs. "Thank you."

Tentatively, Hannibal places a kiss to Will's forehead. "Of course. I'm sure you have many questions." He gives a soft sigh as he watches Will's eyes carefully.

Will gives a soft yawn, too panicked yet tired to even notice the gesture as the exhaustion slams into his body all at once. "Ugh, I'm so tired. Maybe later?"

Hannibal gives a small smile, just an upturn of the corners of his lips. "I need you to stay awake just a bit longer, I have to make sure your concussion will not have any lasting effects."

Will hums in the affirmative and rubs at his eyes. "Make it fast, your bed is way too comfortable to stay awake long."

"Sit up please, slowly." Hannibal places a hand on Will's upper back to help him up.

It's then that Will realizes he doesn't have a shirt on, though luckily he still has his boxers. There's a slight pressure against the back of his head and down his neck, pressing and gently squeezing to feel around the column for swelling or odd positioning. "So, I'm guessing you know more about this virus and what happened at the mall than you're letting on."

Hannibal gives a soft hum. "Hold both of your arms out in front of you please." Will does as told, holding them evenly out. "It's not a virus, though I'm sure you've deduced that by now. Please move your fingers." Will does as instructed. "The event at the mall was but a single stone to send ripples into the waters of society."

Will watches as Hannibal takes both of his hands and squeezes when prompted. "And you're like him? What even…" Will shudders when he feels Hannibal's hand on his cheek.

"The names have changed throughout the years, but I believe the general consensus in today's culture would be vampire." Hannibal gently strokes just below Will's eye, coaxing him to meet his own gaze. "The man you met was but a child compared to most of us. We've lived within polite society for centuries."

Will's eyes widen and his jaw drops open. He gapes at Hannibal as the man lays him back down before he moves towards the door. Will forces his mouth shut, carefully rubbing over his face as a headache forms just behind his eyes. "Strangely enough, that actually makes a lot of sense." He jokes, noticing the slight relaxation of his friend's shoulders as he opens the door.

"Get some rest, Will. I will be back shortly when some food is ready for you." Will hums in acknowledgment as the door closes behind the doctor.

Later, when Will is awoken (and promptly dressed) and they sit around the dining table, Will can't stop watching Hannibal. He knows it's weird and probably annoying, but his curiosity is getting the better of him. It gets to the point where Hannibal sets down his silverware to give his companion his full attention. "Your expressive eyes are betraying your quiet mouth."

Will sets down his fork and sighs. "I wasn't trying to be subtle, though I suppose it wouldn't have hurt to try." He smirks.

Hannibal's face stays blank, but his body language relaxes. "If you do not mind, I do have a question for you, and I would prefer you be completely honest with me."

This makes Will stiffen, but he forces himself to relax. "Okay. If it's about me being scared of you, I'm not."

He sees Hannibal's eyes widen minutely, barely at all, but the surprise is still there. "Aren't you? I could easily kill you."

Will snorts. "If you wanted me dead I'd be dead. You're too curious about me, just like I am with you at the moment."

The comment makes Hannibal smile. "I'm glad we are on the same page. You've answered my question sufficiently, thank you."

Will's eyes go wide. "Were you so certain I'd be scared of you? I mean, yeah finding out you're a vampire was a little shocking, but nothing about you has changed, only my knowledge about you."

"You are the first human to learn of my origins and not look upon me in horror." His face is deceptively blank, but Will can see the emotion in his eyes.

Will doesn't even realize he's reaching across the table until he feels the other man's hand under his palm. "I could almost say the same, Hannibal. You were one of the first people not to look at me like I was insane or pitiful."

Hannibal takes Will's hand in two of his own, pulling it to his lips to kiss the knuckles. A small blush dusts his cheeks at the action. There's a moment of silence after Will gets his hand back, awkward and thick with tension.

"Are there others like you in Baltimore?" Will asks carefully, trying to change the subject.

Hannibal nods. "Indeed, though the area is under my protection there are many younger ones who live in the area as well as all over."

"The, uh, the other vampires, the ones that Jackson Lee turned and had working under him. What's going to happen to them?" Will asks quietly.

"I've been keeping an eye on the news. Obviously the event was too large and well covered not to become public knowledge. There is a council that works to keep our existence lesser known as well as help govern over our race to avoid a repeat of the hunts that has occurred for centuries. In recent years our kind has been reduced to myth and horrible teen novel writing." The last comment earns a laugh from Will. "With the explosion of the vampire populous it's hard to say how well said group will be able to contain the event. The attack was close enough to Baltimore that we may see them coming in this direction. Due to him and his newly formed hoard encroaching upon my territory it's almost guaranteed a member will arrive here shortly to speak with me about the incident."

"And what will you tell them? That you have him paralized in your basement so you can torture him?" Will snorts jokingly.

"Perhaps with more finesse on my part, but in essence yes." Hannibal responds, earning an incredulous look. "His actions led him here to my territory where I succeeded in apprehending him. The council and the one who controls the area where the mall is may not fully appreciate my decision, but his crimes upon my land will be paid in full before he is allowed to leave."

"Judging by that look in your eyes, you've got some kind of strings to pull to get your way whether his crimes were worse or not." Will chides curiously, a glint in his companions eyes.

"I've gained," He leans back in his chair, relaxing. "a rather large amount of respect within our community."

"So those shocked gasps, the few that fell to their knees as if to pray for forgiveness to an angered God?" Will watches his companion carefully, earning a small nod.

"My reputation precedes me." There's a small smirk on his face.

"Quite the reputation, you step into a room and they bow to you in fear like you're gonna eat them alive or something."

Hannibal takes a deep breath, sitting up and taking his fork in hand. "You should eat, Will. It will help with your recovery to keep your strength up."

Will nods and begins eating in earnest. Even after cooling on the table for a bit, the food is still as exquisite as ever.

After dinner, Will is sent to shower by Hannibal, the guest bathroom large and pristine. His mind refuses to calm, thinking of questions that he can't answer and looking back to every minor interaction with the man trying to identify where he did things that seemed inexplicable. This knowledge has him questioning every interaction he's ever had, every case he's ever worked.

The ripper is an actual vampire, not just a weird fan of the creatures like originally thought. According to Hannibal there are a few living in Baltimore, so it could be any of them. Of course, this revelation will need to be kept to himself, the mention of blood sucking creatures actually existing might be the straw to send him to the BSHCI.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Updated
So, as I've been writing this I realized I've been pulling from a lot of different versions of Vampire lore from more shows than just The Vampire Diaries so imma remove that tag since I don't want people getting confused. This is definitely one of the longer chapters! Yay! Please enjoy this addition to our story and leave a kudos if you do!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's as Will is stepping out of the shower that he hears a knocking on the door from below, someone is here. Could the council member be here already? He quickly gets dressed and carefully heads down the stairs, staying out of the entry and just far enough from the voices to hopefully avoid detection.

"-ve heard of your capture of the criminal." A low toned female voice inquired. Her voice demanded respect in a way Will had only ever heard from Hannibal.

"Indeed I have. I can assure you he is paying for his crimes as we speak."

Will can practically hear the frown on her face. "I must insist he be returned with me. He is a member of the Sabbat who broke the Masquerade to an unimaginable degree, the Prince demands his head and those of his faction on spikes. This incident is beyond heinous."

"As was his crime against me and my property. He is paying full due for his actions, I swear upon that." Hannibal responds easily.

"Property? You don't mean that human cowering in the other room do you?" She asks, her tone deceptively light.

Will stiffens at the mention of his discovered hiding spot. After a deep breath he steps out with his head high, confidence resting deep in his chest that blooms from the sheer curiosity of the situation. "My apologies, I didn't want to interrupt your conversation."

"Your consideration is most appreciated." Hannibal nods to him before returning his attention to the woman. "Indeed I do, as well as other actions that can only be interpreted as personal attacks. His retribution shall be paid in his time here."

Will takes this time to glance up at the back of the woman, her long blonde hair curled into a large ringlet over one shoulder. She wears a floor length off the shoulder style black dress with a small train gracing the floor behind her. There's a man next to her, tall and imposing yet silent and able to blend into the sidelines. A guard of some sort. He's easily able to read the man and he's desperate to leave. He knows there's nothing he could do should Hannibal

decide to act, the only use would be as a meat shield. There's no way he could stand up to him, their power balance is horribly on Hannibal's side.

The woman is also easy to read, but she hides it better than the guard. Her shifting shows her nervousness at the confrontation. She's been given orders and doesn't want to return empty handed. Her speech is prickly and defensive, her tone attempting to be familiar and appeal to some friendship they must share.

Hannibal's eyes flicker over to Will, their eyes locking for a moment and he sees it. Hannibal knows that Will sees the reactions of the two, how scared they are just to be in the same room, let alone his territory. He enjoys it, seeing everyone so revenant of his existence. But Will has seen the same look in his eyes when he himself does the opposite, being rude and not afraid of the older vampire. That's why Hannibal finds him interesting, it's refreshing. He's lonely being so detached.

"Hannibal-" She tries, said man raising a hand to stop her.

"Ms. Du Maurier, how long have we known each other?" He asks, his voice matching her deceptive tone.

"Far longer than most have been alive." She responds carefully.

"Indeed. By now you should know that my patience at your demands is wearing thin. The Court of Baltimore as well as whosoever's domain the attack took place on is welcome to converge here to hold a trial for the fledgling, even make requests for his punishment, but he will not be leaving this domain until his debt is paid in kind."

Will can see the miniscule slump of her shoulders before she corrects herself. "And what, pray tell, have you decided makes a fit punishment?"

"He is to feel ten fold the pain he has inflicted upon all of his victims, both upon my domain and otherwise." He says easily, Will noticing the guard stiffening uncomfortably.

"That is quite a serious punishment."

"A serious punishment for a serious crime. He has exposed our kind, turned unnecessary humans for the sake of creating an army only to leave them without proper education or leashes for that matter, and made personal attacks against myself. His fledglings swore loyalty to me and the Camarilla and have since been sent to help any of the fledgling population who converge here to assimilate, as to pay for their crimes as well. Again I say, the punishment is being dealt with due diligence to the laws of our kind as set by the Camarilla."

"You mean as set by yourself? You were one of many voices to create the rules guiding our kind." She points out. Before giving a sigh. "You will need to come to the council to give this report yourself, I am not a carrier pigeon."

Hannibal offers a small nod. "Of course. I will send word when I am able to make the trip, which is far more a courtesy than I received."

She nods. "Please do understand our rush to attempt to get the situation under control."

His eyes narrow only slightly. "I would hope the Court, whose duty is to keep our kind out of the public eye, would be better equipped than to have to rush such as you did in this series of events. Perhaps when I arrive I should assist in getting this mess under control, since it seems your current resources are not able to do so."

Will can hear the threat behind the words, the sharpness sending shivers down his spine. "That's quite alright Hannibal, we have an excellent team working on perfecting the process." She gives a quick bow to Hannibal, her head down. "If you will excuse us, we must be returning shortly."

"Of course." He nods, walking them to the door and letting them out.

It's not until after he hears the engine kick on and the car driving off that Will's able to relax. "You could cut that tension with a knife." He sighs as he physically slumps against the wall.

"You did well to hold your tongue, Bedelia is hardly one to accept disrespect, let alone from a human."

Will huffs a laugh. "Tell me, you said you are acting out the punishment I recommended before passing out, what all does that entail?"

"There are many ways to make a kindred feel pain, especially a fledgling such as himself. Death will be the only peace he will ever feel again." Hannibal smirks as he pulls down a couple of glasses and a bottle of wine from the rack. "Join me?" He asks as he pops the cork with his bare hand.

Will nods carefully and steps towards the doctor. "I see your appreciation for food hasn't diminished with being undead. I meant to ask about it at dinner."

His comment earns a quick snort of air from the vampire. "I like to think it grew to be honest." He answers as he hands Will the glass, earning a nod. "I was a human during a time long before many of the modern farming technologies we have today were even thought of. Now, with easier access to such sustainable products it's much easier to feed my hobbies. I do not get sick, nor do I have trouble digesting, but it does not sustain me. Though I have found temporary satisfaction in rare meat, it's hardly enough to keep me alive."

Will takes a careful sip, keeping his eyes on Hannibal's cheek. "So do you keep a fridge in the basement full of blood bags or do you find it fresh?"

Hannibal sets down his glass before giving a small chuckle. "You've seen far too much television, dear Will."

He simply shrugs, setting his down between them as well. "I guess I don't know which version is correct. You talk about 'domain' and a society with the vampires, I've seen you eat garlic and touch silver, you eat human food. I doubt a gris-gris bag would even touch you."

Hannibal gives him a confused look." Gris-gris? I believe that is a practice originally African in origin? I haven't heard of those in many years. I admit I haven't made contact with one myself, but from what I've heard they can affect us to an extent."

"Good to know." Will mutters under his breath as he smirks.

"As for garlic, silver, or crosses, none of them have affected me. As for our community, that is a long conversation that I will need to imbibe much more wine if you'll be having me get into explaining it in length." Hannibal gives a small smile before grabbing for his glass again.

Will nods and takes his, meandering slowly towards the sitting area. He can feel Hannibal following, it's as if he's locked onto his presence somehow. Chills trickle down his spine, but not in fear or anticipation. He doesn't feel like prey to the beast behind him. It's a warmth, like curling up next to a large fire after being out in the snow all day. The feeling is more akin to a feeling of being possessed and owned than hunted. He already belongs to the beast, there's no reason for a chase.

Will takes the seat to the left of the fireplace, Hannibal to the right with the wine bottle set on a small table beside him. "Belief in the supernatural has existed for as long as I can remember. Whether that belief stemmed from worship or fear depends entirely on the time period and region. Many early European cultures believed that vampires were simply dead bodies brought back due to necromancy of the much more fearsome witches."

Will nods. "It's just people with shiny stones and herbs anymore."

Hannibal smirks but doesn't respond to the comment, the light of the fire rolling across his face in waves. "The witch hunts were simply neighbor turning on neighbor because they did not fit with society's norms or because they were sick with disease. Many of my kind lived through these hunts due to our ability to blend in so well, though many found our customary aversion to sunlight too challenging and fell to the flames or the stake."

This catches Will's attention. "So you are affected by sunlight? I've seen you outside during the day."

He nods, watching the fire. "I've grown resistant to it, with age. What was once a horrible burning sensation is now a minor inconvenience, though shielding the majority of my body in shade or with thick clothing still airs on the side of my well learned caution."

Will thinks back to the conversations he's overheard and the unfamiliar language that has come with them. "I've heard you mention things, phrases that I'm assuming refer to rolls in your... court."

"Ah yes, perhaps a vocabulary lesson is due." Hannibal acknowledges with a slight shift in his seat. "For brevity sake allow me to move through these rather quickly. 'Kindred' is the term we use to refer to others of our kind, 'Fledglings' or 'Neonates' are terms for the youngest of us. I believe your captor called you 'Kine', which is the term for mortals such as yourself. The 'Court' is comprised of multiple roles led by the 'Prince'. They are not like human monarchs, it is a position that can be held by anyone so long as they can defend it.

They rule over different areas such as large cities or districts called 'Domains'. Others can have their own smaller domain within this larger one as allotted by the Prince."

"Strongest rules the masses? Sounds quite barbaric for such an old race." Will does not seemed surprised, only disappointed.

Hannibal's eyebrows lower in despondency. "Hardly. Some of the weakest or even the highly insane can hold the position if they have the right cards in their decks. It's what we call the 'Jihad', or the political game you must play in order to survive. Favors known as 'Boons' are passed around to be held like a coupon to be cashed in at any time, information and blackmail are paramount to survival." He takes a moment to stare into the fire and take a sip of his wine. "It's one of many reasons why I stepped away. I spent so long playing these games that I've decided my modern nights should be spent doing what I enjoy."

"And you enjoy helping pitiful kine through their emotional turmoil? Or would you say you prefer watching us chase our tails solving violent crimes committed by those who even you cannot straighten the psyche of?"

The kindred can't help but smirk at the guarded way Will speaks. "I spent so long feeding on humanity and ruling over it to a degree that I felt I had forgotten what it means to be one."

"You move through shadows like a black cat slinking through it's own territory, hell you lifted a full grown man by his throat. I'm not sure if I would consider that 'getting back in touch with your humanity'." Will adds, finally turning to Hannibal, searching his eyes curiously.

Hannibal shares the look when he turns back to Will, their eyes searching each other's. "With direct eye contact I can enthrall my prey to obey any whim, they become brainless servants until the tie to their master is cut, which I find rather boring to say the least. I find your original thoughts too interesting to force your submission."

Will chuckles as he turns away again, finally taking a sip from the glass he had all but forgotten. Hannibal's eyes linger on his cheek for a moment longer before he twists the stem of his own glass between his fingers. "You've yet to ask the question I know that's been plaguing you since your rescue." Hannibal speaks softly, like he's spoken a secret that no one else should hear, for fear of dire consequences.

Will hesitates, his eyes locking onto the depths of the flames, a log crumbling. His voice is just as quiet, not wanting to break the solemn mood the older man created. "Why haven't you fed off of me?"

Hannibal turns his body towards his friend, a small smile on his face. "I'll admit I couldn't help myself and took a small taste from some splatter along the wall in your home, but I have my reasons for not plunging in. Should I lose myself to the taste, I fear even my willpower will not stop me from draining you."

Will looks up to meet his eyes, seeing only a glimmer of the firelight dancing across the deep blood red of his iris. The warm lighting making the maroon truly stand out from what normally looks like warm honey brown.

Hannibal is quiet for a moment, taking a sip of his wine, which looks blood red in the firelight. "Do you want me to?" He simply asks, his eyes raking over the smaller man's form.

Will sighs, laying his head back against the back of the chair, unknowingly flashing his neck and the large vein in it as he thinks. "I'm not sure." He responds quietly.

Will doesn't realize what he's done until he feels the hard stare from the doctors piercing stare on his neck. He doesn't dare move though, with his eyes closed its almost as if he can feel the gaze like a physical touch. A gentle yet icy finger slowly grazing his skin. Chills flow down his back again, whether in anticipation for his companion to act or for the sake of the game he can't say for sure. There's a strange sort of excitement when it comes to playing cat and mouse, predator and prey, when the lowly house cat is in fact a great Bengal tiger.

"The choice is entirely yours, dear Will." Hannibal's voice is quiet, barely above a whisper. It sounds almost dry, like his throat is parched for the promise of the red liquid coursing through the human's veins.

Will has half a mind to just say yes, to grant the intimate permission that his friend requires. The rest of his thoughts float around the idea of making him work for it, setting up a game for the doctor to play in order to earn the right to get a taste. Blood is sacred after all, the body is a temple and all that.

Knock knock knock knock. Comes loudly and quickly from the door, breaking the tension that formed between them. Will watches Hannibal stand, then suddenly he's gone. His disappearance is followed immediately by the door opening.

'So that's why he's always at the door so quickly.' Will chuckles to himself as he follows to the door. There's a familiar female voice that sounds so scared.

He's not entirely surprised to hear the familiar voice of Alana Bloom, what is shocking however is her physical state when he comes around the corner. Alana is speaking quickly, back currently turned to wear Will is standing. Her words come fast and panicked, Hannibal watching and listening intently. Will hears her say his name and decides it time to intervene.

"Alana?" Will asks a bit louder than her rambling, trying to get her attention. Hannibal's eyes snap up to his when he hears the question, Alana turning to follow his line of sight.

"Oh my God, Will!" She exclaims loudly, quickly coming up to him and wrapping her arms tightly around his shoulders. Hesitantly Will reciprocates the hug, coiling his arms around her waist. "Will I thought you were dead!"

"Alana, you're bleeding." Hannibal says carefully, still standing on the other side of the room near the door.

Will notices the stiffness in his eyes, his body language projects high levels of concern while his eyes show the suspicion he must feel at her injury. Alana carefully pulls away from Will, cradling her arm to her chest. She doesn't seem to be in pain, but nevertheless she's protective of the limb.

"I'm fine, it's nothing." She quickly tries to deflect.

Will carefully reaches forward, gently resting a hand over her arm. She flinches and gives a small hiss at the contact, stepping back from him. "Alana, may I take a look at it?"

She gives a small jump and whirls around to see Hannibal behind her. He moved so silently, neither of them noticed. He lifts his hands in a calming gesture of apology before holding a hand out to offer his assistance. She hesitates for a moment before carefully releasing the tight hold on her arm and passing it over to his waiting hand.

Hannibal nods in thanks to her before stepping a bit closer to pull up her sleeve. Will watches from over her shoulder as he slowly reveals the damaged flesh. There's a large bite mark hidden under poorly wrapped gauze, bruising building wide around the still slightly oozing wound.

"Will, would you be so kind as to grab my medical bag? Black leather, in my study by the door." Hannibal asks, Will nodding and quickly going to get said bag. He then gestures for Alana to take a seat at the island, pulling out a stool for her before one for himself. "Care to tell me what happened?"

"Well," She starts, obviously having calmed down from her previous excitement. "I was supposed to hear from Will a few days ago and never did, so I went to go check on him at Quantico but they said he wasn't there. So I tried calling a couple of times but he never answered. I knew something was wrong so I decided to make the trip to his home." She went silent for a moment, her eyes glazing in the memory. "The house was torn up and bloody, the dogs were loose outside, I thought he might be hurt. When I tried to call Jack I was shaking so badly that I dropped my phone in the mud and shorted it."

Will comes back then with the bag, setting it onto the counter for Hannibal. "I lost my phone during the attack."

She nods carefully as Hannibal begins going through the bag to pull out various medical instruments. "I thought maybe Hannibal might know where you are so I planned to come to Baltimore, but I had to stop to get gas. At the gas station I was met by one of my former patients, a teenage girl. She looked horrible, like she might have been in an accident. When she approached me she kept saying my name, she sounded so scared. I tried to calm her down, but when I moved to touch her she cried out an apology then grabbed my arm and bit me. She clamped down so hard I'm sure more damage was done by removing my arm than the bite itself." She sighs, rubbing her forehead.

"I would agree with you there, the tearing of the skin here is rather deep, though I think I may be able to avoid stitches." He stops prodding her injury to look at her seriously though his face is calm. "I'm going to ask you a few very serious questions, it may sound strange, but you must answer me honestly, Alana."

She nods carefully. "Of course."

"Was she bleeding?" She nods. "Is there any possibility that any of her blood could have gotten into your system? Whether in your mouth or on this wound?"

She stops to think for a minute. "I don't think so? She had some blood on her face but I can't be sure if it got in the wound or not." Her eyes widen in realization. "Do you think she could have been infected with something?"

"I see evidence of healing around the edges, so it's likely some got in." Hannibal gives a small nod before looking to Will, not answering her question. "We will have to keep an eye on her."

She looks up, her eyes darting back and forth between the two men. "Some got in?"

Her question goes momentarily ignored. "Healing? What does that mean?"

"Kindred blood can help with healing, it's been used for years to help heal bite marks to curb suspicion. Once it leaves her system we won't have to worry about her turning."

"How long will it take to be out of her system?" Will asks with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Considering the small amount and no intent to ghoul or turn her I'd say thirty six to forty eight hours should suffice for it to dissipate." Hannibal responds, looking back to the wound. "Of course I don't think she will succumb to her injuries any time soon, so the chances of her becoming a ghoul are slim." Hannibal treats the wound, disinfecting and bandaging the bite.

"Succumb?" She asks quietly.

"You heard what they said about the violence moving this way. Even without their leader they might still be coming this way. They are far more dangerous now that they are without a leader." Will speaks to Hannibal, totally ignoring Alana.

"You mean the terrorist group that's been moving down the coast?" She asks quietly again, looking to Hannibal who hasn't looked up from his work.

"You make an excellent point. Those I've gained may be able to slow them down at the border of my domain, but I doubt even with their strength they could stop them from entering the city, not to mention whatever fledglings they may have added along the way. The group will be far larger now than originally thought."

"Gained? Gained what?" Alana's voice continued to get more and more confused.

"What about the Camarilla? I'm sure this would be as good a time as any to get them involved. Or would they focus more on the rest of the waves of people getting turned. I doubt they are all flooding to Baltimore, realistically they are probably going to spread in all directions."

"Cama-what?" She asks, her voice showing her frustration as they continue to ignore her.

"The Sabbat was the stone." Hannibal comments, looking up to Will.

Wills eyes locked onto his, the earlier conversation coming to mind. "And society the pond."

"Hey!" Alana calls, getting both of their attention as she pulls her finished arm from Hannibal's grip. "I'm still here, and now more confused than ever." She narrows her eyes into an almost glare at Will and Hannibal.

"Right. She won't know what's going on." Will sighs, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Granted 24 hours ago I didn't know either." He gives a shrug as Hannibal packs away the contents of his bag. "Would you like to explain it or do you want me to?"

Hannibal has a small grin on his face as he stands. "Please, the pleasure is all yours."

Alana looks at Hannibal with a bit of concern. The usually stoic man has been acting strangely out of character since she's been here today. "You sure are in a good mood considering the terrorists in your back yard."

He looks up to Alana before looking to Will. "I have to admit, I haven't had this much excitement in centuries. If you'll excuse me." He says the last part in passing as he leaves the room to put the bag away.

Alana looks to Will, the words not quite clicking for a few seconds. "Wait, did he say 'centuries'?"

Will can't help the snort of amusement before he begins. "The news story that you told us to watch, do you remember that?"

"The terrorist attacks along the coast and moving inland, yes. I've gathered that much at least."

"It's not so much a terrorist group. See, the attack was led by a group called 'The Sabbat', we have one of the leaders of a smaller group of them in custody, but it was already too late to do anything. They are attempting to build an army, these people from the theater in Morgantown were his ticket to trying to get as many people under his control as possible."

"Wait, he mentioned me being affected by her blood. If it's not a virus, then what is it?" She subconsciously rubs at the fresh bandage on her arm.

Will pauses with a sigh as he watches a shadowy void begin to take form behind the counter Alana sits at, trying to think of how to explain it. "Well, it's more like another species entirely. If the blood of one of the 'infected' gets into your body and you die with it still in you, you become one of them. That's why you shouldn't have to worry about becoming one."

"Becoming a what?" Her voice hardens as she grips her arm a little tighter.

"A vampire, dear Alana." The voice comes from behind her, Will seeing him step from the darkness before he spoke so he didn't react, unlike Alana who jumped from her chair and wheeled around to see Hannibal at the counter behind where she sat.

"That was rather rude." Will comments calmly.

He can see the mirth in the older man's eyes as he watches Alana. "My apologies."

She takes a breath. "You want me to believe that vampires exist?" Her eyes tighten into a questioning glare as she slowly turned to look between the men on opposite sides of her. Hannibal who, other than the amusement laid bare on his face, is the picture of calm. "Hannibal, you shouldn't feed into his hallucinations like that."

"He's perfectly sane Alana, I can promise you that. Every word he's spoken so far is the truth." He doesn't address the look of skepticism on her face. "After the pack leader's failure to control his new fledglings at the mass embrace at the theater, he left to try another method to grow his army. He went searching for those already turned. In his search he came across Will's home and took him in hopes he'd have information."

"This in turn left all of those newly turned people who don't understand what's going on to rush around on instinct. Like your former patient." Will adds.

"So you were attacked? Why you? You're not a vampire Will." Alana questions.

"No, I'm not. But Hannibal is." This makes Alana freeze to stare at her mentor, Will continuing anyways. "They were able to tell that I knew him and used me as bait. He saved me and captured my captor, who is serving time for his crimes in accordance to their laws."

Alana hasn't stopped staring at Hannibal who hasn't even taken a breath while Will was talking. Her eyes are wide, but it's not entirely in fear, part of her still wants to believe this is all some demented prank the men have set up to scare her. "A vampire? Really? Those are fantasy creatures."

Hannibal carefully straightens out an invisible wrinkle in his jacket. "Fantasy is but the impossible made probable. This, I'm afraid, is entirely real."

"And the fledglings are spreading, they are making their way in all directions. We've reason to believe there is a group coming to Baltimore since that was the original plan of the pack. I can't speak for certain if the Sabbat chapter they are involved in even knew about it though."

Alana sits back in her chair, rubbing her forehead. "No. No way. You've all lost your damn mind."

"Why don't you go make yourself comfortable in the sitting room, Alana. I'll bring you something to drink." Hannibal offers politely.

She gives a quick nod, standing and leaving without her eyes leaving the floor. Will feels some sympathy for her, considering if not for the fact that he saw Hannibal use his abilities he'd probably think he's going crazy too. Hannibal reaches into the fridge and pulls out a glass bottle of a bubbly golden liquid and pops the top off. "Beer?"

"I've been brewing my own specifically to Alana's tastes for a few years now." He answers as he pours it into a tall glass before leading the way into the room.

Will carefully settles himself next to Alana who thankfully takes the drink and downs a good bit of it. "So, vampires are closing in on Baltimore." She says it with little amusement in her voice.

"Welcome to the vampire apocalypse." Will shrugs, earning an amused chuckle from the older man who takes a seat across from them. "I mean, it's not totally wrong. It's like every cliché zombie movie ever."

Hannibal feigns a dramatic sigh, but the laughter in his face betrays any sort of seriousness that the conversation could hold. "You would compare kindred to a hoard of mindless monsters?"

Will wants to laugh, so so badly, but he's able to reign it in for the moment by clearing his throat. "Are the fledglings spreading across the coast really that different?"

Will is surprised to hear the laughter from the woman next to him, but it isn't unwelcome. He looks over to her to see the lingering smile she's hiding behind the lip of her glass. After a moment she looks over at Will, relaxing a bit more into her seat. "How long have you known about all of this vampire stuff?"

"About…" He looks down at his watch. "Twenty eight hours or so."

Her eyes widen at that. "Really? You're surprisingly calm, considering."

His eyes go back to the doctor sitting patiently in front of them, their eyes meeting briefly while he speaks. "I know I'm safe here." His eyes quickly meet the floor before he turns back to Alana. "Hannibal has been very tolerant of my insistent questioning."

"I don't mind. It's been far too long since I've had the chance to reveal myself." Hannibal nods genially.

"So you really are a…" Alana can't find it in herself to finish the sentence.

"Vampire? At least, that's the more modern term for it, yes, though we prefer the term 'Kindred'." Hannibal doesn't move, for a while Will isn't even sure he sees breathing. The only part of Hannibal making any motion is his head, and even then it's only miniscule at best.

"Is it odd of me to say that I almost feel it needs to be proven to me that this isn't some awful prank?" Alana asks quietly, finally putting down the half empty glass next to her.

Will shakes his head. "Since my rescue Hannibal has been rather open about his condition, so it's become easier for me to process."

"You've known me for years so it's only natural you would have doubts. What would you have me do, Alana? Make your request and I will grant it within reason." Hannibal asks carefully with amusement in his eyes.

Will watches as eye contact is made between them, something intimate and personal yet filled with fear and curiosity. Alana doesn't move to answer, obviously unsure herself of what to ask of him. He's laid himself bare before her and she doesn't have any idea of what to do with this chance. Will watches quietly as they both remain silent, Hannibal in waiting and Alana in contemplation.

Finally Will answers for her, the silence stretching on for too long. "The shadows you control, the ones you use to travel so quickly."

Hannibal turned to Will, a look of mischief in his eyes. "Is that what you wish?"

Alana looks to Will with confusion in her eyes. Silently Will nods. Darkness begins to creep up from around the chair Hannibal sits in and slithers across the floor in inky tendrils. The man sits perfectly still without moving as the blackness continues up the walls, snuffing out the fireplace and blocking out the lights around them. Alana sits forward in her seat as she watches in shock, her head on a swivel as she investigates this strange power enveloping them. As if suddenly waking from a nightmare, the room returns to normal save the fire smoldering quietly next to them.

"A fledgling vampire gains a few miniscule abilities when they've turned depending on the bloodline from which the descend. I come from a lineage known as the 'Lasombra', we carry skill in manipulating the darkness." Hannibal responds with a chuckle. "Neonates can only temporarily subdue a human, helps them to hunt and feed. As you saw, I've found the ability most useful in subduing unruly vampires as well."

"Incredible." Is all Alana can think to say after such a display, her eyes still roaming the room to find any other small changes that may have occurred.

"Now that we've established your respective footholds on reality, we should discuss the wave of Sabbat headed this way." Will watches with fascination as Hannibal finally shifts in his seat, folding his hands over his lap.

"Right. I guess I'm still not sure what kind of numbers we are dealing with. Either way, if Alana was attacked at the gas station just outside of Wolf Trap, then they will be here sooner than we have time to build decent defenses." Will sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Will can feel a headache building in his temples and behind his eyes. He is still recovering from his captivity and the beating that came with. A quick assessment of his person reminds him that he was in a hurry to come down from his shower, which means he did not have the chance to stick his aspirin in his pocket. The beating of a drum rings in his head, making it hard to focus on the sound coming from next to him on the couch. Is it talking?

Alana is talking.

"I'm sorry, repeat that?" He asks quietly, her hand resting on his shoulder in worry.

She looks at him as he relaxes into the touch, his posture still stiff. "Are you alright, Will?"

"You are still recovering. Perhaps you should go lie down." Hannibal's voice held no room for argument, but that doesn't mean Will wasn't about to try. Yet, as soon as he opened his mouth he was interrupted. "I promise we won't talk any more business until you return."

Will sighs, giving Alana a small press of his lips in a makeshift smile. He stands and nods to Hannibal with a quick 'thanks' before going up the stairs. As he lowers himself onto the guest

bed he can feel the gentle coolness of a looming darkness that envelops him like a blanket. It's comforting and lulls him to sleep far faster than any medicine ever has.

Chapter End Notes

"Fantasy is the impossible made probable. Science fiction is the improbable made possible." - Rod Serling

Credit for the quote Hannibal mentions.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

What better time to post a new chapter than when at a fanfiction panel at a con haha.

There's a fuzziness to his vision as his mind tries to catch up to his body. The low light coming through the curtains signals that the morning has come. His mind finally clears at the smell of food that hits his nose.

Will slips from the covers he doesn't remember curling up in and goes to his closet on instinct to see it still empty. Will hasn't had a chance to go home so he doesn't have his own clothes. He gives a quick glance in the mirror at his current attire and knows it's anything but suitable, especially with company.

So Will checks the hallway before going into Hannibal's room where he stayed before. He doesn't realize just what kind of mess he's gotten himself into until he opens the closet door. It's a walk in closet that would be better described as another room entirely, all organized very neatly with pressed shirts, suits in bags, shoes on shelves, ties and matching handkerchiefs lined in drawers, and a full length mirror on the wall on the end. It's a little over whelming to see all of the patterns and colors, but as he grazes his fingers of the dress shirts a dark red catches his eye.

This shirt has a much softer material than the other dress shirts, and he's pleasantly surprised when he pulls it out to see its a sweater. It's soft to the touch and the deep maroon color reminds Will briefly of coagulated blood. It puts a small smile on his face.

After finding a pair of black slacks that mostly fit (it's a little loose, but nothing a belt couldn't fix), he takes the clothes to the bathroom with him so that he can get a shower before going down for breakfast.

The sweater is a bit bigger than he expected, granted Hannibal is a size or so bigger than him and probably got this even larger for the sake of comfort. It's definitely comfortable though.

He makes his way down stairs and follows his nose and ears to the kitchen. Hannibal is quiet in his focus as he works on the stove, the contents of the pan colorful and rich though unidentifiable from where he stands. Alana speaks quietly, her hands folded in front of her. When he walks in there's a sort of resigned calm on Hannibal's face that's made to feign interest in what's being spoken. Will notices the change as soon as he enters the room.

He looks up from his work with a small smile, his nod a silent greeting until he sees the clothing he's acquired, which makes his smile grow wider. All of this in the span of about a second.

"Good morning Will. I'm glad to see you're awake." Hannibal greets him, Alana quickly turning to greet him as well, but stopping when she sees his clothes.

"Is that…?" She's unable to finish the thought.

"Yea, I hope you don't mind, Hannibal. I can try to make the trek back home today to get supplies." He offers, hoping he didn't offend the host.

"Nonsense, it's far too dangerous out there for you to go home. I applaud your quick thinking. That color suits you well." He nods before plating whatever he was making, Will hadn't gotten far enough from the entry to see. "If you'd join me both in the dinning room." He nods to the door where both of them obediently go.

Will takes notice of the seating, Hannibal placing himself next to Will and across from Alana instead of at the head. Alana either doesn't notice or doesn't show it because she sits down polite as ever. Once they have all been seated and Hannibal has given his customary discription that makes an omelette sound like it was made by elves at the stroke of midnight under the sacred tree during a full moon, they begin eating. It's quiet for a while before Will finally clears his throat.

"I guess the big question right now is where to go from here." He speaks quietly but firmly, looking to Hannibal as if he has all of the answers.

Hannibal places his silverware down, carefully regarding Will. "That answer depends entirely on what kind of direction you want to take."

"Well," starts Alana, setting down her fork as well. "I'd say the most pressing matter would be the large group headed this way. Do you have any idea what their goals might be?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "As freshly turned as they are, I doubt they've much more than a hunger and whatever left-over influence their master used on them to direct them this way."

"What can we do to prepare? Any sort of defenses or something we can use to hold them off?" Will asks cautiously.

"Is there any way to cure them?" Alana also asks, Will noticing a momentary hitch in Hannibal's expression. It's not anger, more like disappointment with a hint of amusement.

Hannibal carefully leans back in his chair, an air of an amused king rolling around him like an invisible fog. "Can you cure a human of their humanity?" He poses the question rhetorically, both of the humans in the room getting the point. "It's not like a sickness that can be cured. Their bodies have evolved and changed in a way that can only be possibly rectified by a second death."

"And should the need arise, how does one enact this second death?" Will asks without hesitation, earning a small gasp from Alana.

"You want to kill these people? They've done nothing wrong!" Alana immediately gets defensive, her face turning into a mix of anger and fear.

"There's nothing innocent about these people anymore Alana. There's no way to save them, they can assimilate like Hannibal, but you have to think logically here. They don't have people to help them learn to hide within society, to be honest the outbreak was so widespread and continues to spread to the point that there's not going to be a society for them to merge into before long." Will is honestly proud of how steady he's able to keep his voice.

The reality of the situation sets heavily on his shoulders. The way of life they know is going downhill at such a steep incline there can be no hope of rolling backwards. He wants to flinch at the thought but holds steady with a small frown.

"I have to agree with Will." Hannibal says after a moment of silence, both humans turning to him with a bit of shock. "I appreciate the defence, Alana. However, the possibility of things returning to what we've recently established as 'normal' is slim to none. The current climate is heading steadfast towards disaster that humanity will struggle to overcome, if they even can. Human kind will be reduced to livestock, with food for you growing even more scarce, wars and territory disputes will ultimately break out, and who can say the true state of the world with such changes falling upon it in rapid succession. Governments will crumble and without the proper infrastructure society as a whole could completely collapse." Hannibal's mouth sets in a grim line as he stares just past Alana's head in thought. "As for killing my kind, I must confess my concerns for disclosing that information. How am I to know you won't use it against me?"

He turns to Will with a hint of amusement in his eyes which he easily returns with a smirk of his own. "I believe we've already had this conversation. In addition, it would be in poor taste to remove the one man who might be our chance of survival."

Hannibal gives a quick chuckle before turning back to Alana. "Indeed. In that case I'd recommend removal of the head as the most effective. Though going for the heart would be a much easier target, it does come with some requirements. One; the weapon must be made of some form of wood. Two; you can't just graze it, you must go all the way through it. It leaves you very open to counter attack being that close so you need to be careful. If you choose to go for the head, you must completely sever in from the body or desecrate it enough for it to no longer function. I've met some of my kind who survived attempted kills and now live with parts of their heads missing."

Alana finches at the mention of the partial cranial removal and sighs. "I'd hate for us to have to resort to such methods."

"The reality of the situation is not as forgiving as you hope. Things are rapidly changing, and if you aren't able to evolve alongside it there may not be much of a future for you."

Will wants to flinch at the severity of Hannibal's response but keeps himself from doing so with the sheer thought of how true it really is. "I guess we will come to the rebuilding society

bridge when we get to it, for now we need to make it through the vampires coming this way."

"Indeed. If all goes well, you may make it out of this alive." There's a smirk on his face as he speaks this, making Will give a quick huff of amusement.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Damn I'm catching up with myself haha. I try to write chapters ahead of time in hopes of not getting behind, but I've had a hell of a time getting this written down. 😭😅

Will is sitting quietly in the study with the others when the call comes. The quiet ring of Hannibal's phone makes everyones eyes lock onto the device. Hannibal sees the number and Will can almost say he sees a flicker of disgust for the briefest of seconds before he schools the expression and answers the call.

"Mr. Verger. How may I help you?" Hannibal asks with a false kindness that Will can practically feel slithering up his spine.

When they'd all moved to the study Alana and Will had begun making calls and checking the news on Hannibal's tablet respectively. Hannibal had sat at his desk before joining Will in the hunt for updates on his own device. It had been a companionable silence for most of the afternoon until the interruption of the phone call.

Will, who had the foresight to sit in the chair closest to the desk (that's what he's gonna call it, but honestly it was completely by chance) which gives him just enough distance to pretend not to hear the other side even though he can.

"Hannibal, it's been too long. Truly. I was hoping you'd be free for me to come talk to that pesky little psycho you've got locked away. I'll even bring Margot, I know you love her company."

'Sounds more like you're the psycho' Will thinks to himself. Just the sound of the nasally pitch to his voice and the way he stretches the vowels give him the thought of a conniving little bastard that he already knows he's not gonna like.

"Of course, Margot is always welcome." The unspoken 'But you're not' is pretty apparent to the others. Will has to suppress a smile at the obvious dislike. "When are you thinking you'll be by?"

"Oh, I'm quite close. There's so little traffic anymore since all of the humans are too scared to go out, it's refreshing."

Hannibal keeps his voice a neutral calm, but lets out a sigh before responding. "Yes, well. Thank you for letting me know in advance. I don't have him housed here, but I can direct you to him and meet you there."

Hannibal stands, but doesn't even move from the desk before the distinct sound of the door opening can be heard. The loud slam of what could be assumed to be the door handle against the wall makes Will physically finch at the sound.

"Nonsense, we can go together." The voice calls from the entry way. "Where have you hidden yourself?" He asks as he stalks through the halls before finding the group in the study. "Ah ha! Found you."

Alana carefully stands, watching the newcomer wearily. The blonde man makes the hairs on the back of Will's neck stand on end. He's not scared though, fear would be wasted on a man like him. No, he's just severely creeped out. The woman who walks up behind him however seems just as unimpressed with his actions as Hannibal.

"My apologies for the intrusion." His greesey smile widens when he finally takes notice of the other two in the room. "Oh, you've got guests. Are they staying for dinner?"

Will pushes himself up to his feet with a glare sent very obviously towards the intruder as Hannibal leaves his spot by the desk. His strides are long and calm, an eerie kind of calm that is more threatening than placating.

"Mason, Margot. I wasn't expecting you so soon. If you'll allow me to grab my coat we can get going right away." Hannibal offers the woman, now identified as Margot, a small nod before turning back to the smiling Mason.

"You're not going to introduce us to your friends? That's rather rude of you." He goads, his eyes roaming over Will hungrily.

"Mason," the girl finally speaks with a hushed scolding tone. "leave them alone. We came here for a reason, let's go."

"Why the rush? We have plenty of time." His eyes haven't moved from Will's body, roaming over it again and again.

One second he's by the doorway, and the next he's about six feet closer, but has stopped due to Hannibal's right hand gripping tightly to Mason's right shoulder. Hannibal stands about half way in front of him with his back turned to the humans. Will couldn't see either of them move, just a sudden change of positioning in the blink of an eye. He can't even see Hannibal breathing, his posture totally rigid in finality as he stands tall against the blonde man. Will doesn't even need to see his face to know the death that resides in his glare, and secretly prays to never be on the other side of it.

"I suggest," Hannibal starts with a tone of severe caution. "that we get going. I'd hate for you to get caught outside after daybreak."

Will can see Hannibal give a tight squeeze to the other man's shoulder obviously meant to be a warning. Either Mason is very brave or very stupid because the obvious warnings seem to go in one ear and out the other. "Ah ah ah," He warns as he takes a step back, Hannibal letting go of his shoulder. "it wouldn't bode well for you to harm a committee member. But, I did overstep a bit so I'll let this slide."

Will has the fleeting thought that if Hannibal doesn't kill the smarmy bastard, he just might. Watching the pride roll off of him in waves is giving him a migraine and he already knows that the almighty doctor isn't going to be as liberal with the aspirin as he would like.

"There's just one teensy little hitch, however. Margot doesn't do well with violence, I'd hate to take her with us." Mason fakes a pout.

"She is welcome to stay behind here." Will gives him a sceptical look, but after seeing the reassuring nod he gives to said girl he feels stupid for thinking he'd leave them alone with someone dangerous.

"Then we're all set! My car is out front!" Mason grins as he turns, Hannibal following him towards the door.

"Your chauffeur is welcome to follow behind me in my Bentley." Hannibal responds before turning to nod in farewell to everyone.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> Oh man, I'm getting caught up to my reserve chapters 😅. It also doesn't help that I work a lot and have the attention span of a fish lol. It's not over yet, far from it, I just hope I can keep up haha! I hope you guys like the new chapter! I love reading your comments and theories so please don't hesitate to leave them!

Hannibal gets out from the vehicle just as the other car pulls up beside it. The driver quickly jumps out to open the back door, hurrying to step out of the way as the blonde steps out with a flourish of unnecessary-

On second thought, everything about him is entirely unnecessary.

"What an ominous looking building." Mason comments as he looks around. "Should I fear my own safety? I certainly wouldn't want to fall victim to whatever horrors you've committed upon our friend inside." His lips crook at the joke.

"Should you keep any more intrusive thoughts to yourself, we will get along just fine." Hannibal answers quietly as he begins the march to the large doors.

Mason catches up, staying directly beside him, his driver apparently coming along as well but staying a few steps behind. Apparently only two of the three know their place on this particular totem pole. "You say intrusive thoughts as if I fear them. Oh no, I enjoy them immensely." Hannibal doesn't speak as he reaches the door and pulls out his key. "Oh I get it, you're still upset about earlier, you don't want me playing with your new toy."

Hannibal stops before turning the key, slowly rotating to the man before standing to his full height. Mason is standing very closely which quickly changes as there's a shift in the air. He takes a step back before his eyes lock onto Hannibal's, his smirk gone.

"Do not forget your station so easily Mr. Verger." His voice and face are entirely calm, the only malice in his words and the air around them. It's like the danger is rolling off of him in physical waves. "You attempt to cause submission with the incessant reminder of your seat on the council, I have no fear of your position. I do not regard you or your mantle with any more respect than minimally demanded by our customs. You are allowed this interview purely out of my respect for the laws of our kind, but my patience is wearing incredibly thin with your disrespect." Hannibal watches Mason carefully. "I have no problem revoking the hospitality I've shown you while within my territory, as is entirely within my rights." The vice over them grows thicker and heavier with the words.

His gaze doesn't waver as the driver visibly starts to deflate from the effort of staying on his feet, Hannibal watching the young councilman carefully. There's a flash of an attempted snarl, but it's quickly schooled when their eyes meet. He doesn't speak for the moment, but Hannibal can almost see a tremble in his lip, likely another attempt at anger.

"I would recommend you consider any further actions with immense caution. Have we reached an understanding Mr. Verger?" Mason nods again, swallowing audibly.

With a nod of confirmation in return he swivels back around to unlock the door, the air instantly becoming lighter. The driver immediately backs off, headed to the vehicles in a brisk pace that can only be described as just short of fleeing. Mason curses under his breath, something about his cowardice, as Hannibal pays no mind and leaves him behind in the doorway.

He catches up, following behind and to the right as he should, and quietly accompanies the older man through the dark halls and rooms. The building was obviously set up like a maze with Hannibal the only man aware of the path in and out. It gives Mason chills at the thought of being left behind. He tries to pick up any lingering clues or sights to indicate their movements, but every hall and room looks exactly the same in an effort to confuse whatever rat is stuck inside. It's elaborate for a prison.

They stop after going down into a basement level and through another set of maze like halls before coming to a door where Hannibal stops. He steps to the side to look at Mason. "I have him imprisoned here. He was paralyzed once, then healed, so his movements are choppy at best I'm afraid. He is chained at the ankles, but you shouldn't have to worry about him attacking you."

"Right. You've always rather enjoyed paralyzation, it's something even the strongest of us can never completely heal." Mason glances up at him and has to suppress a shiver at the upturned lip that almost looks more like a snarl than a smile.

"I shall remain in one of these rooms just out here. When you are ready I'll lead you back outside." He instructs before walking away towards another room. He stops himself when he hears the door open. "Oh, and Mr. Verger? I'd prefer if you left him alive."

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Will couldn't help but feel on edge at first, but can you really blame him? The one man, vampire, who he can trust just left with a psychotic one to torture an evil one and left them here with an unnerving one. It's so basic and yet oh so complicated.

It's been a couple of hours, and although Will doesn't seem completely trusting of their new companion, it certainly hasn't deterred Alana. Will has taken the last hour and a half or so to move outside, find a decently large branch that he could lob off of a tree with a knife, and carve a crude stake out of said stick.

By the time he comes back inside Alana and Margot have made themselves comfortable next to the empty fireplace. They turn to look at him but don't stop their conversation. He in turn takes the exclusion as a chance to start a fire and retrieve his own glass of the beer he notices the girls are drinking. After finally getting these things settled he sits back in the spot he was before, close enough to share in the conversation should his input be wanted, but far enough to not be a bother should they not.

Apparently the latter can only last so long around Alana. "Hey Will, Margot has agreed to answer any questions you might have."

"About?" Amazing how a single worded question could have so many answers.

Margot speaks this time, taking a careful sip of her drink in between sentences. "Vampires, the state of the country, what the council plans to do. Dr. Lecter."

Will watches her eyes for a moment. There's a silent stare down between them with really no meaning behind it other than she's waiting for an answer and he's trying to pick one. "I'll admit that I'm curious about Hannibal, though I feel it's in bad taste to talk about him when he's not here."

Margot smirks. "I'm sure that's why he agreed to leave me here. He knows you'll ask me questions. He's the smartest man in the room even when he's not in the room, always ten steps ahead, never one to be underestimated."

"What can you tell us about him? I mean, I knew him as my mentor at Johns Hopkins, but I didn't know about- his condition until recently." Alana quickly corrects herself.

"He's an old blood, as far as most can guess he's probably the oldest."

"What is an old blood?" Will asks quietly.

"When one of us has been around for a certain amount of time and gained a certain amount of respect you are considered an old blood. There really is no exact number, but it's usually somewhere in the thousands. My brother will be reaching the status soon. As a council member he already garners quite an amount of respect he has no problem using every chance he gets." She sighs, looking at her glass while swirling the amber liquid.

"You said you think he's the oldest but you don't know for sure?" Alana frowns.

"I was there when he talked to some woman from the council." Will adds. "She mentioned something about him helping to form the council and your laws."

"Tall, blonde, with an eternal look of constipation?" Margot quirks an eyebrow as Will nods. "Bedelia Du Maurier. She's one of the eldest on the council and was also present for the forming of the council. From what I've heard Dr. Lecter was considered an old blood with much respect even then which is why they trusted him to help with such tasks. The council was formed during the early to mid Era of Rome. Something like six hundred to four hundred BC. Bedelia was turned sometime during the establishment of Rome specifically to help in the establishment of the council."

"She was literally made for it." Will scoffs. "I guess that would make Hannibal around… four thousand?" He's not even sure why his voice comes out so level and calm, the realization is pretty shocking.

How the man in question could possibly be old enough to remember the rise of the Roman empire is a little hard to grasp, granted the idea of eternal life is still a bit new in itself.

"I did ask him once if he and the general were one in the same, apparently he went by a different name during that time. Pity." She emphasizes the last word with a drink.

Alana watches the air blankly in thought for a moment before turning back to their guest. "So, what else can you tell us? I'll admit I'm still pretty green to all of this, so whatever you're able to offer I'm sure will be helpful."

Margot thinks for a second. "There's a lot of tradition, especially within the council. Though as you saw earlier with my brother not everyone is as eager to keep it, notably the new bloods. What he did, attempting to attack a human, who is obviously under Hannibal's protection, in his territory, in front of the man himself? Had it been anyone other than Hannibal it would have been suicide then and there."

"Your brother doesn't seem the type to follow the rules." Will comments, earning a snort.

"Hardly. I'd kill him myself if not for the fall of house Verger. With all of these old men they still very much believe that women belong in the kitchen raising the kids. If Mason were to get killed off now, I'd lose our seat on the council. It would go to the next family in line. The only way to secure it were to be if I were to have a child, which is physically impossible."

"But you just told me your brother was born a vampire." Alana frowns.

"Yea, I said it's impossible for *me* to have a child. The only way for our kind to be born is for a male of our kind to impregnate a human female. They usually die because of the birth, however, somehow my mother lived to have another child, a human one. It's a fifty-fifty

chance of the child being human or not. When I was born one they decided to raise me and bite me as an adult. Mason killed them before then though and bit me at eighteen." She lets out a small sigh. "Because of this he is my sire and I'm beholden to him until either he dies or I drink his blood."

Alana sighs as well. "That's a terrible situation."

"I'd very much like to be rid of him."

"As would I." A low voice says from the entrance to the study, startling everyone including Margot.

"Hannibal." Will sighs as he realizes he instinctively reached for the stake now tucked into the hem of his pants.

"Where's Mason?" Alana asks carefully, noticing a lack of psychotic energy.

"He said he had a stop to make on his way back. I've no idea what kind, but I'm sure he'll return shortly." Hannibal sighs as he enters, standing just behind where Will sits on the chair. "I apologize for eavesdropping, but I couldn't help but hear the conversation on my way in. Your situation with your brother is most undesirable."

"And during these times of tension in our community, it's hard to get away." Margot sits up from her previously relaxed position. "My brother insists on dragging me along with him on his escapades, today has been my first reprieve in a long while, I'm thankful for your hospitality Dr. Lecter." She gives a small bow of her head towards him.

Will looks back to Hannibal who seems amused. "Margot, I've known you and your brother since you were children, you needn't use your formalities with me, especially not in my own home."

She gives a brief thankful smile. "My brother Will return for me soon, I should prepare."

"Margot, how truly desperate are you to get away from your brother?" This makes her pause as she stands from her seat.

"What do you have in mind?" She inquires with a narrowing of the eyes.

"I have another property just outside of Baltimore. If you'd like to avoid your brother for a time you are welcome to stay there. You would be under my protection." She opens her mouth to speak but is stopped when he raises his hand. "As I said before, you are always welcome here. Unlike your brother I know you can behave yourself."

Her face lights up in a way Will never thought he'd see in his lifetime or hers. "Are you sure? This could hold grave consequences and I'd hate to impose-"

"Nothing of the sort, I'm offering. I do have one request, though. I'd like for you to take Alana with you."

Alana immediately jumps to her feet. "Hannibal, what are you doing?"

"My home here is the center of my territory, far too close to the boundary of Baltimore and far too dangerous for you. I'd be much more at ease knowing you are safe further away from here." His voice is calm and placating.

Alana tries to speak, but is cut off by Margot before she gets more than two words out. "I'll do it."

Hannibal nods and pulls a set of keys from his desk, walking around the couch and handing them to her, folding his own hands around hers. He leans in close, probably telling her how to get to the house before carefully backing away with a nod to Alana.

After exchanging quick hugs with Alana, Will watches as Hannibal escorts them to the garage and within a few minutes he hears the sound of a small car, then they are off and gone. Hannibal joins Will once again in the house where they settle in the kitchen. Hannibal is about to speak when he's cut off by a knocking at his door. It's very slow but strong.

"Mason?" Will asks with a quirked eyebrow.

"I would believe so, unless you think they would still run mail during this?" Hannibal asks with a smirk.

Will can't help but reflect the small smile as Hannibal moves for the door, not in the obvious hurry as he was with himself or Alana. "What did you do, scare him into submission?" Will jokes as Hannibal goes to open the door, though he does see a flash of teeth in response.

He opens the door and steps aside, letting Mason in. "I've come to retrieve my sister, we best get going soon."

"I'm afraid she's not here." Hannibal answers calmly as he returns to the kitchen where Will is waiting.

"Excuse me?" Mason pauses before his face twists into anger.

"She left while we were gone, took one of my vehicles."

"Where's that human lady from before? Probably took her for food." Mason quips out of fury.

"Alana left of her own volition to check on her family. Your sister fled while I was outside." Will adds with a glare of contempt.

"You were outside, hm? That's the best excuse you can come up with?!" He yells as he lunges at Will.

The councilman stops short with his face mere inches from Will's. His eyes are wide in horror with his fangs elongated in anger as he looks at the human who shows no fear. Slowly he looks down at the wooden point pressed to the breast of his jacket.

"Here's my alibi, want a closer look?" Will asks as he pushes the stake harder.

Mason backs off with a growl, looking to Hannibal as if expecting help. Instead he only sees a pleased look being sent towards the human before his face hardens and turns towards him. "Mr. Verger, your actions while within my territory and home have proven to me that you are not fit for your position on the council." This makes Mason's whole body freeze. "I am truly sorry for your loss of your sister, but as a candidate for elevation to old blood status as well as a member of the governing body of our people your behavior is entirely impermissible. I've made my stance on this subject very clear and refuse to repeat myself like a parent to an unruly child." Hannibal steps towards Will, Mason reflexively stepping back at the show of power. "I will only say this once, so let me be clear. You are to leave my territory and not return. Should contact need be made to myself or my prisoner it will not be made by you. Do you understand, Mason Verger?"

Mason opens his mouth to make more ear-splitting noises that could be interpreted as the English language, but in an effort to not *have* to deal with that Will speaks up first.

"Please go, Mr. Verger." His voice is filled with annoyance.

"You'll pay for this, Lecter." He growls before stomping off, Hannibal following him to the door.

"I'm sure you'll try." He responds softly as Mason leaves the house, watching closely as he gets into his vehicle.

Unseen to anyone else, he gives a small nod and a quick gesture to follow him to someone in the distance. Two more people join the first as they get into a black vehicle and move to

follow the Verger car. After checking all is set he steps back inside with a satisfaction written plainly on his face.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> So I had the realization while preparing to post this chapter that a lot of what I'd planned for the pre-apocalyptic events is happening currently with the Corona virus... I already had most of the storyline plotted out, but the correlation is kinda hilarious to me. Anyways, this is the first dirty chapter, so I hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will decides after everything he's dealt with today that he needs a shower. He can almost feel the physical slime and grease that leaked through Masons words crawling across his skin. Hannibal agrees and takes his own as well, agreeing to reconvene in the study.

He spends most of his shower scrubbing his skin raw until it glows pink like a nasty sunburn. Then his mind provides images at the passing thought that Hannibal is in his own shower at the same time. He tries to pass on the thought, but his already strong imagination has latched on and his own body doesn't seem opposed to the fantasy either.

The shower in his master bath is probably just as elegant as the rest of the home, some sort of wooden paneling or stone and multiple shower heads. The steam would billow out of there so slowly like a rolling fog.

Will tries to shake his head to remove the train of thought, to will away his erection, but as much as he would deny to anyone who asked he is actually quite curious.

As he strips out of his clothes would he fold them nicely and set them aside for later attention or just toss them in a hamper like a normal person? His mind provides an image like a movie, cinematic with camera angles and lighting.

Hannibal steps into the bathroom, his jacket and vest are already gone, left with only his pants and shirt. His hands are already working on his shirt buttons, carefully removing each one, his minds camera zooming in on his lightly furred chest as it's slowly revealed .

Will unconsciously licks his lips and places a hand against the wall to steady himself.

Once divested of his shirt Hannibal reaches in to turn on the shower before removing his pants, he's bare underneath. Will has seen the strength of his legs just through the shifting tightness of his trousers, so the sight of the doctor in his mind makes him bite back a moan.

He carefully takes his erection in hand, fighting off another noise. The few lovers he's had in the past have always noticed and made comments about how vocal he is. It's not something he does on purpose, though he's tried to learn to limit his outbursts.

He watches Hannibal step behind the steamed glass door, standing beneath the water as it flows down from a large overhead sprayer. He dips his head beneath the shower head and the product immediately melts from his hair. He carefully combs his fingers through his hair before adding shampoo and deeply scrubbing his scalp. He turns his back to the faucet and arches his back, stretching as he washes the soap from his head. He does it again with the conditioner, Will getting a fantastic view through the steam .

His strokes become faster as he watches Hannibal wash his skin, following closely as his hands roam his body, washing away whatever impurities dare touch his tanned skin. Will has to lean his head against the shower wall, the water running lukewarm over his back. He doesn't care.

Hannibal's hands caress and knead each muscle carefully, Will can almost feel those large hands on his own skin making him let out a choked off noise. He feels almost like the fantasy is a forbidden dream, not just because of the shower scene he's witnessing, but due to the subject as well. An ancient vampire whose power seems to even scare those who should rank above him into submission.

Quickly the scene shifts, red splatter covering Hannibal's skin, but he continues to wash it away like it's no more than a subtle inconvenience. Orange-red washes down the drain in quick swirls, collecting briefly around his feet before being sucked down. Will watches as he licks his lips in satisfaction, collecting a splatter of blood from his face on his tongue. His eyes are a deep blood red in satisfaction.

Will's eyes pop open and he bites the back of his forearm to muffle the shout as he orgasms. It leaks down the wall of the shower as his breath comes out in pants. His first thought after his fantasy came to fruition was the thought of seeing Hannibal downstairs freshly showered and not being able to look at him for fear of the dream rearing its head again. He'll probably be able to tell, smell it somehow maybe.

He quickly rinses off the wall and himself then steps out only to freeze. There's clothing set on the sink as well as a towel. He distinctly doesn't remember grabbing them, which means Hannibal was in there. He quickly looks back to assess the visibility of the shower door and to his dismay it's not near as fogged now since the water turned cold.

A blush of embarrassment covers his face as he quickly thinks back. Did he hear him enter? (Of course not, the guy is silent as the dead (pun intended)). Could he have heard anything? (He tried to bite back and muffle, but those can only go so far).

Could he have stood and watched like Will did in his mind?

The thought makes his spent dick twitch in appreciation of the idea, but Will quickly curses himself and begins drying off. The clothes left behind, he realizes, are what he wore before. His worn flannel and comfortable slacks look brand new without the bloodstains. On a whim he decides to leave the top couple of buttons untouched on the shirt.

After fumbling with his hair and noticing that his beard has gotten thicker, he gives a sigh and heads downstairs. Hannibal is standing near a window at the end of the hall just below the stairs, and he is a sight to behold. He's statuesque like a painting, leaning casually against the side of the window as he glances out of it. His arms are crossed over his chest, one hand unfolded to hold a glass of wine near his figure, as well as his weight shifted to one leg with the other crossed over. He wears black pants and a white shirt with the top few buttons undone and the sleeves rolled up. The outfit seems to look much more fitting on the doctor than the three piece suit, most likely because of the lack of crazy patterns (and there certainly have been some questionable choices). Maybe it's because of the confidence he seems to exude just by existing, or how much more casual and real he appears at the moment.

The vampire looks over at Will as he reaches the last few steps, breaking the peaceful stillness he seemed to master as he stands straight again. "Hello, Will."

"Hello, Hannibal. Did you find something interesting outside?" He asks as he steps closer to look out the window into the vast darkness. There's only the occasional city light that can be seen in the distance through the houses of suburbia. Will can hear a quiet sniff and immediately freezes. His earlier thought of him being able to smell it flickers through his brain before he turns to look at him out of confusion. "Did you just smell me?"

"Difficult to avoid. It's nice to finally catch a whiff of the true Will Graham, not hidden under that horrible aftershave. Smelt like something with a ship on the bottle." Hannibal responds easily with a smile.

"I keep getting it for Christmas." He sighs, crossing his arms over his chest.

It's silent for a moment as maroon eyes peruse over his form before Hannibal steps aside, gesturing towards the study. "Care to join me?"

Will nods and silently leads them into the sitting area where he takes his usual seat to the left of the fire as Hannibal pours another glass as well as refills his own. He joins the younger man and passes over the glass, forgoing his seat to stand near the flame. He watches it for a moment before speaking without looking away. "I've received an invitation."

"A party? In the midst of the apocalypse?" Will quips as he sips delicately from his glass, earning a smirk from the vampire before he turns from the fireplace to address Will directly.

"I'm afraid this invitation has less enjoyable inclinations. I've been asked to attend a gathering of the council and prominent members of our kind to discuss said 'apocalypse'." He says the last word with an amused chuckle. "I do not blame them their fear at the current circumstances, many of the possibilities we previously discussed are looking more likely as time progresses. We've been able to live in an ignorant bliss for the last few days here in my territory, but the state of the rest of the Americas is rapidly declining."

"I saw that the president is in the process of declaring a nation wide state of emergency." Will remembers the article well, the thought giving him chills.

"Indeed. All international travel has been banned, as well as all Americans who have traveled overseas are being quarantined." Hannibal gives a soft sigh. "Scientists have begun attempting to find ways to identify those who have been turned."

This makes Will pause. "Is that possible?"

Hannibal makes a noncommittal noise followed up with a sigh. "Sadly with the rate modern sciences have progressed it's a definite possibility. I've been studying the condition extensively for many years and even with my broad knowledge I can't say for sure. We can immediately recognize each other, it's an instinctive mentality to join together to hunt."

"What about blood testing? Would something like that reveal anything?" Will quirks an eyebrow as the doctor finally sits down.

"I've had my blood tested before. In essence, the purpose of drinking blood is because we don't have enough of our own to keep our bodies functioning. When that blood enters us it becomes our own, I don't just have the blood of random humans in my veins. Though depending on the type I feed on my blood type can change." He offers a small smirk at the last comment, earning a snort of amusement from Will.

"So, back to the invitation, why are you telling me this? Obviously you should go."

"Of course, I plan to." He gives Will a look that can only be described as feline in nature with mischief glinting in his eyes. Like the Cheshire cat personified. "I'd like for you to join me."

Will frowns. Admittedly not the reaction Hannibal was probably hoping for. "You want me to accompany you to a meeting full of prolific vampires to discuss the state of the human race?"

The vampire in question only smiles even wider, a hint of a canine peeking through his lips. "Essentially. You won't be the only human. Many bring human companions to events held by the council, some mean to feed off of them or show off some sort of oddity. Though some simply bring a companion. I myself have never taken to the practice, but until now I hadn't a human worth bringing."

Will tries to fight the blush at the compliment before relaxing again. "Why bring me if in all of your time you've never brought one before? Are you not worried about what people might say?"

Will would have believed the doctor to be far too well mannered to scoff, far too dignified to make the noise, however, the sound flows seamlessly from his lips in a relaxed tone that implies his amusement. "I've grown far too comfortable in my age and station to care."

Will laughs in a way he hasn't in a long time, a joyous thing that brings out a genuine smile. "Is that your elegant equivalent to 'I'm too old to give a shit'?"

Hannibal nods with a grin of his own that never seems to leave his face around Will. "Precisely."

"You're far too well mannered to curse." Will teases.

"Oh no, I do. Just not out loud, nor typically in English." He corrects light heartedly.

This makes Will give another softer laugh. "Okay. I'll go with you on one condition." Hannibal turns to him with a look of amused questioning. "I want to hear the great Hannibal Lecter curse. English or otherwise."

Hannibal sits for a moment in thought before smiling. "Futuo was a common word thrown around when I lived in Rome."

"And what would that translate to?" Will asks in amusement.

"Fornication with a woman, though I'm sure you're just wanting to hear me say fuck." He answers honestly, to Will's surprise. "I've said it twice now, so you dare not go back on your word."

"I wouldn't dream of it." Will smirks. "When is this gathering anyways?"

"As all public flights have been grounded until further notice, we will be flying privately. We should be set to leave for Washington by tomorrow evening. My kind rather enjoys the state for its lack of sunlight." Hannibal responds easily.

"Flying privately? A private plane?" Will eyes him in amusement. Of course he has a private plane.

"They are sponsoring one for many of us in the area to take together, but I decided after the spectacle Mason made of himself that I would rather not voluntarily sit in a small metal tube with the man." He gives a small sigh, watching the fire, probably imagining what would happen should he have agreed to the shared flight. Surely a bloodbath.

"Margot said that your kind are very strict and have a lot of rules, just how many did he break while he was here?"

"Old world or new world?"

He glances over his wine glass at his friend. "Both." He quickly adds "What's the difference?"

"The old laws were far more aggressive than today's. After the council realized that times were changing, they knew they would need to change as well. Far fewer laws now, and far less strict as well. As for just his visit today, the new laws would be around the twenties just counting what I can think of from the top of my head."

"And the old laws?"

"At least forty, easily."

Will laughs heartily. "Only? I'd have thought he was much worse."

"Oh, he can be, that was him behaving himself, rather pitiful really."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for waiting, I know it's been a bit. I tried to post another chapter of a different story in the hopes of some appeasement, but then I remembered you guys probably haven't seen that one... Oops lol. So I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Please don't be afraid to leave kudos and comments, I love to read your theories!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

So, hello again lol. It's amazing how busy I've been considering we are supposed to be UNDER QUARANTINE. I'm still working so I haven't had a lot of time to write. On the good side, I somehow made it through the entire hannigram tag on Ao3!

What does this mean? Well. Let me explain.

When I get REALLY into a Fandom or ship in particular, I go to the tag for that fandom/ship and set it to organize from the oldest first to the latest. I don't read every single fic, but I read a good chunk of them. It's been a good few months since I finished watching Hannibal and man have fallen HARD into this Fandom. Thank you to all of the amazing fannibals I've met while getting into it. 😊

Okay, now that that's said, I'll quit boring you. Enjoy the new chapter! 😊😊😁😁

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is thankful in a way he couldn't possibly express in words when they make the trip out to his house. Hannibal is never more than a dozen feet from him as he spends a short time with his now wild dogs, only a few of them still hanging around the old house, attempts to put his house back into some sort of order, shave off the course hairs that have sprouted out much longer than he prefers, and the doctor even assists with helping to pack up some of his clothes. He uses the luggage he owns as well as a small bag Hannibal smartly thought to bring along.

He prides himself in not being one to own many things, in fact a lot of the things he didn't think he would need to bring were thrown in by the older man. Hannibal did, however, carefully remove the bottle of aftershave before Will could use it, let alone pack it. They don't really say anything to each other throughout the time spent there, but it's not uncomfortable. It exists in a plane between companionable and natural that doesn't feel forced or awkward.

What does feel awkward, or maybe uncomfortable would be a better word to describe it, would be the lack of civilization visible to them on their trip. It was quiet as they drove through Baltimore. There's no other cars on the road, no lights in any houses or buildings, not a soul in sight to even suggest that anyone is still alive. It causes a shiver of fear and resentment to travel down Will's spine. Hannibal hadn't been lying when he said that they were blissfully ignorant while living in his home. Because of his generator, and his seemingly

mysterious way of acquiring food, they have not spent a moment without the luxuries that had become hard to find in modern times.

Will has to wonder if it's because of his position within the territory or if it's just Hannibal being Hannibal. He's always been an enigma, something that Will hasn't been able to totally figure out even with knowing that he is a vampire. Honestly, knowing that he's a vampire just makes it even harder to try and describe him in a way that would make sense to literally any other person.

He can say that he is a very elegant and well-spoken man who has had a long time to learn and master his art, a renaissance man of sorts. But even then, there's no way that it could encompass the true fantastic power and respect he commands, all of which stems from experience and strength on its own.

The roads are mostly clear once they leave his home, one or two cars passing them going towards DC most likely if Will had to guess. The city had a steady stream of people rushing to and fro from government building to government building unlike Baltimore which was almost vacant, a ghost town already in the making. The comparison is startling between the two cities that are only an hour apart. They don't spend long there, though.

They arrive at the air strip just before sun down, which surprised Will since he hadn't really been keeping track of time. Their late start through him off even more. Usually Hannibal was bright eyed and bushy tailed before dawn, so allowing him to sleep in was likely done for Will's sake.

Hannibal parks the car just to the side of the strip, a couple of men in uniforms approaching the car. Hannibal easily slips from his seat to meet them standing. Will quickly exits as well, only catching the end of the short conversation.

"-bags are marked. The others are to be left for our return." Hannibal directs before popping the trunk. The younger of the two men nods in a respectful bow before rounding the vehicle to grab the mentioned suitcases.

"Of course sir, and your vehicle will be looked after in your absence." The older of the attendants didn't even make an effort to acknowledge Will's presence, which honestly he didn't mind.

"Yes, thank you. Is the captain on board?" Hannibal asks as he closes the car door and hands off the keys.

"Yes sir, the plane is ready whenever you are." He nods once before stepping and turning out of the way.

"Splendid." Hannibal finally turns to Will, a small smirk on his face. "Shall we?"

He makes his way around the front of the car to stand at the vampire's side before they are led by the suited man to their plane. Will can already hear the loud hum of the engines as they climb up the steps into the lavish plane. There are a few scattered seats along the walls, a small couch, a couple of folding tables attached just below the windows. A short blonde woman, obviously the stewardess, greets them politely as they enter.

The interior is cozy, dark cherry detailing with warm browns and leathers, definitely Hannibal's tastes. Hannibal offers for Will to take a seat, obviously letting him take his pick of the chairs. When he doesn't immediately move the older man slips into a low back chair with a table. Will sits across from him.

The captain then comes from the cockpit to introduce himself briefly to Hannibal, explaining quickly the current weather both in their current position and to where they are headed. Again, he doesn't pay any mind to Will, acting as if he doesn't exist. In a quick moment he realizes that the stewardess never looked at him either, only Hannibal then bowed so her eyes were on the floor.

He has to consciously fight the irritated frown he wants to give his company.

Once the captain excuses himself back to the front of the plane and out of earshot, Will finally asks. "Have I become invisible?" His voice drips with a barely contained sarcasm and malice.

Hannibal only smirks, though, before Will can feel the lurch of the plane moving. "In the eyes of our laws, you practically are." The Vampire watches out the window for a moment before making eye contact. "You are joining me on this trip as my companion, which to our kind means not only are you my duty to look out for, for lack of a better term you are my property." Will gives a huff of amused annoyance. "It would be against many laws to interact with you without my express permission, a way to prevent over eager new bloods from committing a taboo against the old bloods. Many now won't even acknowledge your existence until specifically introduced, it's safer for them."

"And what is the punishment for such a taboo?" Will asks as the plane leaves the ground.

"Many factors could determine the extent of punishment. Who the 'owner' of sorts is, what the opposing vampire did to the companion, how public this display was. There are few exceptions to this rule, however, such as if the human is breaking a law without their accompaniment around or if their life is in danger. These exceptions are also at the discretion of the companions sponsor." Hannibal examines his face for a moment, noticing his annoyance slowly diminishing. "It's interesting. You typically sidestep around any attempts at social interaction, yet you are bothered by their purposeful ignorance of your existence."

Will gives a small chuckle. "Probably because my avoidance is my choice." He sighs before changing the subject from his lack of sociability. "What other unspoken rules should I be aware of?"

"I wouldn't think it to be an issue, but I wouldn't recommend making eye contact with anyone but myself." Hannibal responds with a small smirk, earning a small humored snort from Will.

"Yeah, that won't be an issue." He sighs.

"You needn't worry Will, no harm will come to you while in my presence." He offers a small nod as the plane leaves the ground.

"I feel like the way you phrased that leaves room for loopholes." Will scoffs, but can't help the amusement in his tone.

"I highly doubt you'll want to be attached to my hip the entire time. Or would you rather I pull you along on a leash, my loyal pet to follow me throughout the event?" This comment earns what Will tries to pull off as a glare, but there's a hint of amusement and challenge in his eyes. "The practice is actually rather common, you'll see quite a few displays of dominance. Speaking of, should you see someone disciplining or hurting their companion, you are not to interfere."

This makes Will lose the levity in his blue eyes. "If I see a human being abused by their vampire master I'm not to interfere." He parrots back with a bit more edge in his tone.

"Or the other way around, you'd be surprised by the submissive streak that can run through those who have lived through centuries with society demanding they act as the predators they are supposed to be. It is a misapprehension that submission makes one week, in fact I believe a willingness and trust to release yourself into the care of another takes quite the collection of courage." Hannibal seamlessly responds with his body as calm as the waters of a pond on a day with no wind.

"So would you let me lead you around on a chain?" Will asks mischievously, continuing before Hannibal can answer. "You're asking me not to interfere if I see someone being hurt, Hannibal."

"It is not our business, nor is it our place. The staff of the event won't let things get too far, 'Justice means minding one's own business and not meddling with other men's concerns', after all."

"Did you just quote a Greek philosopher to tell me to stay out of it?" Will fights a smirk. "Alright, the point is taken."

Hannibal watches Will for a moment. "I find the action rather intriguing to witness, when the human companion asserts their control of the situation. The same laws apply, no one is to make contact with the human unless given permission, but still they demand your attention."

"I don't see you being the submissive type. To let others control you in such a way, you're far too commanding of yourself and your position to ever do something like that." Will teases, though his voice is rather monotone as he loses interest.

Out of his peripheral as he looks out the window he can see a smirk on Hannibal's face. "The function is not requiring a formal dress code excluding the ball the first night. This party is simply to reacquaint with old friends as well as make new allies. It's far more important for many new bloods and newer old bloods than those of us who have already acquired the necessary resources. You will see and hear many business dealings throughout the night as well.

"After that it will move into more of the serious matter that we were brought here for. I will be rather busy during this time, and you are welcome to join me for as little or as much as you'd like. I believe your insight into the subjects we discuss could be refreshing."

Will gives him a sceptical look. "Really? What could a lowly human possibly say of value in this situation?" He snarks, attempting to get comfortable as the stewardess comes by with a glass of wine and a glass of what looks like whiskey.

Hannibal's smile fades a bit. "Do not degrade your sharp mind, dear Will. Just like with all large groups, many separate into factions that hold similar beliefs. They get so focused on trying to appease that collection of like minded individuals that they forget what is best for the remainder of our kind."

"Even the vampires have political parties." Will gripes, deadpan as he takes a sip.

"And as such, it could do well to have outsider insight."

Will sighs. "Since this outbreak is so close to home for us, I'm sure that will give us a lot more flexibility as well as control over trying to contain it. Or do you want to let them continue to multiply?"

"Personally I'm a solitary creature, it goes against many instincts of our kind but I've found it beneficial. This rise in the population will only cause problems within both societies, it has already made many difficulties arise in such a short time. Should the humans catch on that it is not a virus, but a species that is dangerous to their way of life, there is no doubt they will pursue us." Hannibal glances out the window at the darkened sky. "It would cause far too

much trouble should a monster chase begin." A charmed smile pushes at his lips, showing a sliver of sharp teeth. "However, I do rather enjoy a good hunt."

Chapter End Notes

Final note, please stay safe out there everyone! I know it's kinda scary, and being stuck at home might be getting on your nerves, but don't dismay! Continue to practice good habits and we can all hope this will be over soon. (please don't flame me, I'm trying to stay optimistic lol).

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> Guess what! I got a beta reader! I wanna give a special thanks to @Semp1ternal who was amazing at reviewing this chapter! I will say it is a bit shorter than my usual update, but I promise its no less important of a lead-in for what's to come :).

The plane lands carefully on the tarmac, the men being led from it by another gentleman in a professional manner. The pilot and stewardess give a small thank you to Hannibal (which Will can tell extends to him, but they wouldn't dare say so aloud.) As they exit, their bags are being unloaded into a car that already has someone waiting next to it. It must be a driver because he opens the back door as they approach. Hannibal gestures for Will to climb into the ostentatious, sleek car first, where Will is surprised to see someone waiting inside.

Bedelia looks up at him before quickly glancing to Hannibal as he slips in next to him.

"Bedelia, I never would have thought you to be the welcoming committee type." Hannibal greets with a smirk.

"Neither did I, but your arrival is notable enough to warrant some hospitality on the council's part. Though, lord knows your presence is more anticipated than my own." Bedelia sighs as she takes a sip of wine, her eyes flickering again to Will.

"Yes, I'm sure you remember Will Graham?" He gives the cursory introduction, Bedelia not hesitating to take in his state of dress. Will knew they'd be flying, so he took it upon himself to throw on a comfortable pair of jeans and an old sweater, not particularly caring for anything other than comfort at this point.

"I do, though our meeting was brief." She responds carefully.

“Do tell me, Bedelia, what do you make of the current situation?” Hannibal asks, his eyes watching her closely.

“I’ll be frank, I think this convention is unnecessary. We have people specifically placed to handle situations like this.”

“There’s never been a situation like this.” Hannibal counters, his tone calm, but Will can tell he’s not pleased.

“Admittedly, we weren’t able to get a hold of it as soon as we would have liked, but-” She quickly quiets at the sigh Hannibal lets out.

In no recent memory can Will ever recall hearing the other man sigh like that. It’s resigned, disappointed and frustrated. Probably the most emotion that’s been shown openly by him in a long time. The human takes a glance at Bedelia, who does well to hide the lingering fear she must feel, but her brave face has some cracks in it. He knows that Hannibal can see them too.

“I made my intentions well known to you when you made your argument in my home, my mind has not changed. I’ve been passively observing the changes being made over time by the council and I’ve made no move to interfere, but this attack and subsequent population increase have proven far too difficult for you to control on your own. Is that not why this event was pulled together on such short notice?” Hannibal reponds, his eyes falling heavily onto her. Will can tell it makes her uncomfortable. “You’ve begun rushing like hens without heads, only creating chaos and a larger mess as you go. Seeing first hand as the head of the Baltimore and Washington territory, there have been no effective moves made by the council.”

She gives a small nod. “This is why I’ve asked you here. Your input and expertise will be greatly beneficial.” There’s a lingering spit of venom in her words, it’s obvious that she doesn’t want him here. But Hannibal either doesn’t hear it or doesn’t care. Will’s betting on the latter.

“This is an issue that must be dealt with before it reaches its tipping point, and I can say with some certainty that it has already begun to tilt quite precariously,” Hannibal adds quietly.

Will watches out the window as the city of Seattle comes into view. It's clouded and darkened by the lack of light, a slight wind attacking passerby on the streets. Hannibal can smell the resignation and fascination in the air around the human. He typically doesn't pay much mind to the pheromones and scents that humans give off, but the particular collection of recognizable elements in his personal aroma is a holy gathering all their own.

"I will apologize in advance for the traffic, a tortoise in the desert has more haste." Bedelia comfortably moves the subject after a moment of silence.

Hannibal doesn't comment on this shift.

"Quite alright. I do look forward to being received and reacquainting myself with the area. It's been far too long." He turns to watch the human who has unknowingly slid closer to the older vampire in order to angle himself to watch out the window the way he wants. He is far too peaceful and relaxed near two deadly predators, but he wears it well, Hannibal would burn the image into the heavens themselves if he could. "Have you ever been, Will?"

He blinks once without turning away from the glass as if returning from so me internal thought before answering. "Not Seattle specifically. Some smaller port towns around the waterways when I was younger."

"There are many bewitching sights, t he forests are a true natural beauty. Should the opportunity arise, I'd be honored to take you to see some of these places." Hannibal comments as Will finally turns to look at him.

"Sure, why not?" He offers a placating smile before his eyes flick to Bedelia, who has been watching the encounter. His gaze doesn't linger long, quickly sliding back to the window.

Hannibal can't help but watch the way the muted light lands across his features. The light is low not only from clouded skies, but tinted windows add an ambiance to the already statuesque shape of his face. He takes only a moment to add the sight to his memory palace. The room built for the man next to him has grown exponentially in the last week. He bears no complaints about the renovations he's had to make.

Hannibal turns back to the woman across from him, a small tilt of his lip in satisfaction at the unimpressed look on her face. He starts to make small talk with her, but his peripheral vision is locked onto Will. Every twitch and lovely sigh that leaves his lips is documented mentally. Even with his attention divided he's still very attentive to his conversation with Bedelia. Yet, he's certainly not oblivious when Will gives another small shift, trying to look at the top of a building along the street they're on. His foot slides over with the movement and lightly taps the older man's. Will doesn't seem conscious of the movement, so Hannibal doesn't show that he is either, but the satisfaction of Will being this comfortable around him makes his already rather high pride soar.

It's truly fascinating how something so small can have such an impact on his emotional state. He elects to investigate it later.

They reach the hotel, a large five star one by the water. The sun is in the midst of lowering itself past the horizon, golds and reds dancing across the clouded skies. The natural lighting does wonders for setting the scene of the lavish hotel, the reflection of the colors glare over windows and bounce off of dark paneling that covers the exterior walls. The entrance is left without the dark brown coating, the bare cement contrasting the warm tones with a harsh weather-worn grey. Warm exterior lights have turned on from the darkened lighting, giving the inside a welcoming pull. The car door is opened by a hotel staff member, who lowers his gaze without saying a word. Bedelia slides out first, then Will follows. His eyes are immediately drawn to the immaculate entrance, the lack of windows, or even walls for that matter, only add to the airy and open design. This place looks absolutely prodigious and far too elaborate for Will to approach at any other time than when accompanying Hannibal.

The five-star hotel did not spare any expenses when preparing for the influx of visitors. Guards stand at the large beams that act as support for the higher levels, employees rushing around both outside and in. A young man in a uniform brings out a small trolley to load their bags onto. There are people standing alongside the roped off drop off area, most of them appearing to be locals trying to see what all of the fuss is about. A few people are scattered in there with cameras, a couple of them flashing.

All of this is ticking by in what feels like slow motion, his mind a whirring carousel as he attempts to take it all in. Then a familiar hand is pressed against his lower back, a sense of calm washing over him as the spinning children's ride of his mind slows to a stop. He looks to the man on his left, a small smile on the older man's face. "Welcome to Seattle, Will."

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> Another big thanks to @reading_in_moonlight for beta reading! Honestly the sheer amount of mistakes in that chapter is kind of embarrassing 😅. How you guys put up with me without one I'll never understand ❤️❤️. Hope you guys enjoy this chapter! Kudos keep Hannibal fed and comments give me life 😊.

Will nods quietly, letting his head fall casually as he scratches the back of his neck. He lets Hannibal lead him inside, hand cool against the warmth of his body seeping through the sweater. The lobby is even more grand than from what he saw outside. They kept the warm stone decor running throughout the interior as well. There's fairy lights strung up along the railing lining the small cafe on the main floor as well as a fire lit in the large stone column that divides the spaces. There are also many people scattered across seating areas and standing along the walls talking. They all carry this easy confidence, obviously here for the conference, chattering with their colleagues.

Until they walked in.

Not three steps in the door, most of the conversations fell silent. The few remaining discussions Will can only assume are from the humans not involved in the gala. Of course, such an innocuous pair stopping all dialogue in the room just by entering would get anyone's attention. Hannibal's stride never falters; he doesn't show any outward emotion like the act affects him. The only thing betraying his pride is the tightening of his hand on Will's back and the twinkle in his eye. It’s possessive, watchful, and Will has to make himself look away from his companion before he sees too much. He’s hardly in the optimal place to go into a trance.

They walk straight to the front desk, the woman behind the desk instantly fixing her posturing and offering a hospitable smile to Hannibal. The vampire returns the gesture, removing his hand from Will to speak to her. He’d be lying if he said he didn't miss the reassuring touch.

Will’s gaze stays low, mainly on either the countertop or the simple pattern of Hannibal's suit jacket, but he doesn't let himself fold down. He keeps his posture upright and his face neutral, not letting himself tick or shift uncomfortably. He puts up an invisible wall, a barrier to the force of the gazes on his back. The eyes on him feel like needles pricking his skin, even if they aren't technically on him as an individual and he lets that fuel his spite. The disbelief is practically palpable, the bitter tart curiosity and intrigue is harsh on his tongue. Hannibal mentioned that he's never brought company to an event, in a thousand years he's never brought anyone.

No one else has been worthy.

Out of the corner of his eye he sees Bedelia join them at the counter. "Mistress Du Maurier." The girl bows slightly in her direction, her attention not totally leaving Hannibal either.

"Hello. This is one of our… more esteemed guests. I believe we have the presidential suite set aside for Dr. Lecter." Bedelia is kind to the girl, much more than she's shown to any of them so far.

The girl remains entirely calm, her voice not changing or wavering. "Ah yes, of course." Will can hear the quick typing on her computer before a pair of cards is set on the counter with a room number written neatly on the front. "Here are two key cards Dr. Lecter, as well as an itinerary for the events. Your room will be on the top floor, room number 3." She offers Hannibal a small smile.

"Much appreciated." Hannibal nods to her before turning to the boy manning the cart with their luggage. "If you would be so kind?"

"Of course sir, do I have your permission to enter the room?" He asks, his eyes not reaching Hannibal's.

Hannibal pulls one of the cards from the sleeve and passes it to him. "Yes, thank you."

The boy bows slightly before leaving the group standing next to the counter. Some small amount of chatter now permeating the room, Will summarizes it’s about them. Will's eyes don't leave either the familiar warm brown of Hannibal's coat or the architecture around them. Not until Hannibal gets his attention.

"So, what shall we do first?" Hannibal asks in Will's direction, though Bedelia chooses to answer.

"I'd recommend refreshing yourselves from your flight, then maybe returning to the main ballroom to intermingle for a time before the gala?" Bedelia suggests, her tone much more beguiling than it has been while in private.

Hannibal continues to look to Will. It takes a moment before Will looks up and nods. The idea of returning to the crowd is annoying, but taking a small reprieve sounds fantastic. Bedelia nods before leaving them, going to talk to a couple of others in the corner.

They head towards the elevators, his disheveled reflection returning his glare from the polished metal doors. The one that comes down for them is empty, luckily. As soon as the doors close Will feels like he can let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding. "You seem rather distressed, Will." Hannibal's soft voice breaks the silence.

"I-" He stops to think on it for a moment. "I guess the idea didn't seem quite as grand as the reality." He takes a deep breath, watching the floor counter steadily rise.

"There is something truly intrinsic about my kinds' ability to flock together." This comment makes Will turn to Hannibal. His face is calm with a hint of concern in the press of his brows.

"Do you regret agreeing to join me?"

Will immediately shakes his head. "Of course not Hannibal, I just wasn't expecting the reaction in the entrance. Granted, I wasn't exactly sure what to expect at all."

This earns a chuckle. "You were ill prepared for that kind of reception. I will apologize in advance, as that kind of reaction is rather common around me. I should have made you aware."

Will waves it off. "It's fine. Now that the initial shock of my appearance with you has given me an idea of what I'm in for…" Will trails off at a loss for words.

"It'll be easier to acquit yourself I hope." Hannibal suggests, earning a nod.

"Right." Will sighs as the elevator doors open.

There is a man standing waiting just to the side of the elevator. He looks like a typical businessman, wearing a navy suit and a briefcase. His black hair slicked back and an ostentatious gold watch on his wrist. He's likely a CEO or higher up traveling for work. Why he's up on the top floor though is anyone's guess. No company would willingly shell out for a top shelf place like this.

His eyes are on his phone but quickly flick up to them, taking in Hannibal's fine tailored plaid suit and Will's comfortable well-worn clothes. Truly opposite sides of the clothing spectrum. Hannibal steps off first, leading Will off of the elevator. The man doesn't wait, simply walking forward, almost bumping into the smaller human if not for Will's reflexive decision to step sideways to avoid him.

Will steps over towards Hannibal, both of their gazes locked onto the rude man. Will can see the sneer on his face as the doors close. His annoyance at their basic existence practically flowing off of him like a thick fog, flooding the floor and air around them. Just before the door closes he hears a camera click followed by quiet disapproving scoff from the man.

Will wants to look at Hannibal, and ask him what just happened. Maybe he could try to joke about the situation to play it off, but there's a tinkling in his instincts, a chill shooting down his spine and across his pale flesh. There's nothing he can say to alleviate the situation. He acted against Will, which as the vampire has previously explained is a direct slight against him.

He feels like the time drags, tension now clouding the fog of displeasure soaking into his clothes and lungs. He drowns in it. He realizes it was only moments when the world snaps back to its rightful pace, Hannibal's large hand on his back.

"Just down this way." Hannibal directs, his voice not betraying the calm mask that he quickly placed over his fine features.

Will doesn't dare try to fight or question the motion. His feet immediately moving from there towards where he's being led. His eyes scan the walls and floor, occasionally noticing small details like a random small scuff hidden by a table leg until the exact right angle.

He's done nothing wrong, yet he still feels like a scolded child being led to his room. Even if the older man can hide his displeasure on the surface, it's still very apparent in the air around them. Like the waves of calm lights have turned into a strobe, flashing out a warning or an SOS. He doesn't even risk a glance at the vampire until they reach the room and he watches Hannibal unlock the door.

They step inside, their bags set just off to the side of the main entrance, and the key card is left on the side table next to the door. Will quickly snatches it up and slips it into his pocket, and Hannibal does not comment on the action.

"Shall we take a look around?" Hannibal asks as he casually leads the way into the hall and out into the main floor plan.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to @Sempiternal for beta reading for me! I really appreciate it!

Will isn't surprised at the lavish interior of the hotel room, it's a direct reflection of the rest of the opulent building. It's definitely the type of hotel room Hannibal would have. Hannibal allows him to wander at his own pace, taking a quick glance to see his eyes quickly abscond from Will's direction. He almost wants to laugh at the vampire but instead just lets an amused smile pass over his face.

He takes a moment at every painting and piece of decor, enjoying the mood they set for the suite. He makes a mental note at how unnecessary it is to have two dining areas yet no kitchen. Hannibal must be internally screaming about that injustice. They most likely want people to order from room service. At least they gave them a mini-fridge, coffeemaker, and a microwave. They look almost like they shouldn't be there, though, like they were brought in by request and don't naturally belong as part of the room.

He can feel the eyes practically caressing his skin again, like the light trail of a finger brushing against the line of his spine. Will doesn't turn, instead taking a moment to appreciate the amount of alcohol placed inside of the refrigerated bar. "You must be absolutely outraged by the lack of kitchen."

He can feel more than hear the slow footsteps approaching him from behind. "Positively fuming." The voice teases back before stopping just behind and to the right of him.

Will finally turns, the men sharing a smirk. "How much time do we have before we need to head down?"

"The gala begins in approximately," he looks at his watch "three hours give or take."

"Do you want to go back down as she suggested? Go socialize for an hour before getting ready?" Will carefully steps closer. Why, he's not sure, simply the feel of the moment.

Hannibal's eyes crinkle minutely with amusement, but otherwise, he doesn't move. "Seems rather redundant to go down and converse when we will be doing exactly that three hours from now, wouldn't you agree?"

Will nods and continues to stalk around until he gets to a door. He carefully opens it, realizing it leads to the bedroom. Inside is a gigantic king-sized bed and a large TV. On the side is another door that leads to a large marble encrusted bathroom. Everything is white marble and he mentally curses himself when he thinks of how hard it would be to clean the blood off of it.

He's spent too much time with a vampire, or maybe on crime scenes.

When he comes back out of the bathroom, he sees Hannibal sitting in a chair set to the side of the bed. He has removed his jacket and lain it across the bed carefully, his legs crossed in front of him.

"There's only one bed." Will notes, though cringes at how obvious the observation is.

"Indeed. You are welcome to take this room."

Will immediately jumps to argue. "No Hannibal. I'm fine taking the couch. You're the one that's actually supposed to be here. Besides, you and I both know you're gonna spend way longer in this bathroom than I do." He tacks on the last part as a joke, only earning a raised eyebrow from the older man.

"Do we? And as far as 'belonging' here, you are just as much a guest as I, you are also my personal guest." Hannibal leans forward, looking at Will over the bed. "I'd be remiss to allow such a thing.

"A good host should take a guest's request into consideration, right?" Will crosses his arms defiantly.

He doesn't even know why he's arguing with Hannibal. Honestly, he makes sense, does it even really matter? The way they speak doesn't feel serious though, god it's almost flirty. He doesn't want to analyze it too hard.

"William," uh oh, the whole name "Having you in here is much safer. Besides, in case you've forgotten, I'm an immortal creature that lives off of human blood. I don't need to sleep." His tone doesn't hold the finality that his words do, he's amused by the show of noncompliance in the human.

Will wants to roll his eyes, he hasn't forgotten. It's impossible to forget something like that. Then his mind supplies him with a compromise, sharing the bed. Hannibal pulled in close to him from behind, his nose buried in his hair and an arm looped protectively around his waist.

He pulls himself from that thought only to earn another amused look from Hannibal. Shit, does he know what just popped up in his head? No, no way. "Alright, fine, but if I decide we need to then we can switch."

Hannibal offers a small nod, deciding the matter dealt with. "Would you like to use the shower or eat first? I ordered something for you earlier, it should be here shortly."

Will comes around and props himself on top of the duvet near Hannibal's chair. "I'll wait until after I eat." He can't help but glance up at the man for a moment.

Hannibal's attention is currently on the duvet wrinkling under where Will has unceremoniously plopped himself down. There's a mixture of amusement and disappointment in his eyes, like the look you'd give a dog who's being a pain but manages to make it look cute while doing it so you can't muster up the effort to be mad. He's given that look to a lot of his pack members.

"I was thinking of checking the local news channels for updates if you'd like to join me?" Hannibal asks as he stands.

Will nods and stands, moving to leave the room. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Hannibal fix the bed before following. He's barely able to fight off a laugh, it coming out like an amused chortle. Hannibal doesn't comment on it as they go to the living area.

There are two large couches set in an L shape facing the window, a smaller armchair set in front of the glass, and two more medium-sized armchairs facing the others that sit in front of the fireplace. There's a bookshelf off to the side of the hearth and a large TV hanging above it on the stone-covered wall.

"Honestly, the amount of seating in here is ridiculous for a room meant for two." Will sighs before taking a seat on the couch facing the windows, sitting long-ways to face the TV. Of course, due to having some manners, he makes sure his feet don't touch the couch, keeping one folded off the side and the other tucked up over his other leg.

He would have expected the vampire to stand, or even take the other couch at least, but after he grabs the remote he takes a seat at the opposite end, reaching to slip Will's shoes off before gently pulling them into his lap. Will doesn't fight it, though he has a lot of questions. He doesn't get a chance to voice them, though, since the TV catches his immediate attention as Hannibal turns up the volume.

The man speaks with a slight accent, but his words are still very clear. There's obvious displeasure in his posture as he talks about the issue. There's a picture of the states that have confirmed cases, a large red blob sitting centrally over Maryland and Virginia and bleeding into the other surrounding states. In another small window next to it is a man in a video call, obviously some sort of doctor or supposed expert on the matter.

"- but this has carried in a way unseen with viruses that carry similar symptoms. These cases could be a predictor of future outbreaks. That's because some of the infected people in this outbreak didn't die early enough, even though they were still showing some symptoms.

"But this outbreak's problem is much bigger. For one thing, as health officials can only see the cases that were identified, there may be hundreds of thousands more cases that have gone unrecognized and will probably spread undetected for who knows how long."

Will involuntarily finches, a soft sigh coming with it. "Tell me the truth, Hannibal. You said we lived in a pretty safe ignorance, which I'm beginning to think I took far more advantage of than before. How bad is it, really?"

Hannibal clicks off the television with one hand, the other carefully rubbing a circle around the bone in Will's ankle- how long has he been doing that?- before looking over towards him. He switches which hand is on his leg, resting the other across the back of the couch as he turns more towards his direction.

"The entirety of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware have been overrun. There is a large increase in cases as it moves north towards Pennsylvania, but has covered more ground moving away from the coast. North Carolina is on the verge of being inundated." His eyes are calm, but there's obvious displeasure on his face. "Many of the affected states are calling a state of emergency and are requesting the president to do so as well. Last I was made aware, approximately twelve percent of the population of Virginia is estimated to have been infected."

That makes Will freeze. "Holy shit, Hannibal." After a moment he pulls his feet from the psychiatrist's lap and turns to put his head in his hands. After taking a moment to breathe he looks back to Hannibal, then back at the screen. "Turn it back on."

Hannibal does as asked, though there is a deep line of vexation on his face. Their conversation must not have taken long since the 'expert' is still talking.

"*-and there aren't any standardized ways to test for the infection. We know so little about what it is, let alone trying to stop it.*

"The problem here is that with these viruses, you really only get one chance. Once a person is infected, the body doesn't even get a chance to fight it off. Most are dying immediately after exposure, far faster than from the advanced stages of this infection. If the victim survives the initial contact and is able to adjust to its effects, it's almost impossible to get them under control.

"*They show signs of increased physical prowess such as increased speed and strength as well as enhanced senses and aggression, unlike anything we've seen before. We believe that the*

virus attacks the cerebrum, affecting these things in addition to giving them a one-track mindset, described to us by a few still verbal infected as a deep set hunger."

"What do you have to say about all of this?" Will asks, turning once more to his companion.

Hannibal gives a soft sigh. "It's concerning, to say the least. As we discussed some days ago, there are obvious issues such as supplies for those who have isolated themselves to avoid being turned, as well as blood to feed these newly transformed fledglings. There is the pressing matter of revealing vampire kind to humans and what their general reaction will be. Not to mention that we really have no way to stop the spread. Even if every fledgling was taken under the wing of someone who is qualified in the eyes of the council to care for one, they would have to be spread extremely thinly to avoid detection. And we are far beyond the point of avoiding detection."

"There really is no good way to handle it, is there?" Will asks, a pit of hopelessness building in his chest. His empathy screams in his mind for these people. They've got no choice in the matter and have no idea what's happened to them.

"Not without a certain amount of violence to ensue."

Will catches the older man's gaze on his own and can't help but look deeper. He projects a deep-set concern and exasperation, whether about the circumstances or the conversation he's not sure.

"Is that what you plan to suggest to the council?" He asks quietly.

The twinkle of levity returns to the maroon irises, no other changes being made to his posture or face. "I have far more to discuss with the council than just what's occurring outside. It's obvious that some adjustments need to be made from within before we can even hope to wrangle the newborns."

With that, there's a knock on the door to the suite, a voice on the other side calling out to identify themselves as room service. Will moves to stand, Hannibal beating him to it. So

instead he slowly makes his way to the smaller dining table. He waits to sit until Hannibal returns with a tray balanced on his left arm.

"Please, have a seat. You should eat." Hannibal instructs as he sets the bucket to the side and slides the plate from the tray to the table.

Will notices the lack of a second plate. "What about you?" He takes his seat as instructed, Hannibal pulling the cover from the dish with his usual flourish.

There's a small smirk on his face as he gestures to the bucket, mini-fridge, and bar. "As per part of the agreement with the select humans who do know of our… affliction, we are kept well stocked."

Will glances at the bar before nodding once and starting in on his food. "How do you normally get your blood? Obviously you don't keep it in the fridge in the kitchen."

"You are correct. My time as a surgeon has awarded me with acquaintances who are able to assist in my diet." That's the only answer he offers as he begins to unbutton the cuffs of his sleeves. "If you'll excuse me, I will go and shower while you eat."

Will nods again as Hannibal walks off towards the bedroom. If anyone were to notice his eyes follow lower than Hannibal's back as he leaves, he will deny it til the day he dies.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> Any mistakes in this chapter are my own!
> Kudos help Will get dressed up for the evening, comments help Hannibal take it off of him. 😉

Inhale, exhale. In, out.

Will breathes in the fog forming around him, the scalding water abusing his already deep pink skin. He allows the watery mist to fill his lungs, as it leaves he allows it to take some stress along with it. He has no reason to be concerned, tonight he steps foot into a gala hosted and attended almost entirely by elite vampires, yet he will probably be the safest he's been in years.

Under the watchful eye of Dr. Lecter, no one would dare cross or harm him. There's a sense of protection, something like a safety blanket that the monsters can't climb through that settles around him. His mind provides the image of himself raised high in a tower, alligators in moats snapping at undead below, and Hannibal standing by his side with a hand rested gently over his shoulder. The image isn't nearly as concerning as it perhaps should be, in fact, it makes him smile.

It's hard to spend an abundant amount of time with the older man and not notice his manipulative tendencies. His carefully chosen visage and words are not simply because he's trying to keep with modern times. Will has seen the look in his eye when something goes exactly to plan, there's a satisfaction that's swiftly followed by disappointment. He's been playing with human minds for so long they don't entertain him anymore.

Will, apparently, is the exception.

Hannibal is a mostly blank slate when Will looks at him, it's one of the things that's endeared him to the man. His walls are as tall and sturdy as that of the tower he would keep Will in. Occasionally, however, there is a slip. A slight relaxing of those steel chains he uses to hold

back his reactions, whether these are on purpose or not has yet to be determined. In these small slips, sometimes Will can see admiration, surprise, pleasure, and even sadness. All of these directed at the younger man, the *human*.

After scrubbing his scalp half to death, he finally decides the climb out of the shower. He makes quick work with the towel, drying himself off. He rests the towel around his shoulders as he strolls towards the sink, catching his own gaze in the reflection. Gently caressing the growth on his chin, he notices how long his curls have gotten since the self-isolation had begun as well. He had a chance to give himself a quick trim of his beard before their flight, but it already looks scruffy.

After taking a moment to frown at his reflection, he decides he’s gonna need to clean up a bit before tonight. Luckily, when they had been packing, he made sure to include his clippers and hair scissors. Will takes the towel from around his shoulders and quickly wraps it around his waist just in case before carefully opening the door to the bedroom. Scanning over the room quickly, he’s relieved to find no vampire roommate in sight. With a sigh he steps out and begins to dig in his bag, pulling out the aforementioned trimmers as well as a pair of boxers and an undershirt.

As he moves to stand and put on the underwear, out of the corner of his eye he sees a garment bag hanging next to the door of the bathroom. There’s a lingering suspicion that the suit inside is for him, and he is confirmed when he opens it to see a dark navy blue suit, waistcoat included. On the table beside the bag are a neatly folded black shirt, a shoebox, a watch, a belt, and a tie with a matching handkerchief. He pauses for a moment to look over everything he has been provided, wondering when Hannibal had time to put this together. There’s no doubt the suit would fit well, Hannibal probably wouldn't let him be seen in an ill-fit suit.

He can’t help the small disbelieving scoff. It’s not surprising Hannibal would go this far, he never does anything in half measures.

Taking the clippers and towel to the bathroom, he tosses the undershirt back into the bag, he wouldn't want to get hair on it. He gets the electric trimmers plugged in, pulling out the scissors and comb as well. He’s been giving himself haircuts for years, so he’s confident he can get it done quickly. While it’s still somewhat damp he begins working, able to get it trimmed to a more reasonable length pretty easily. After that he trims up his beard once more, taking a bit more time to clean up around the edges.

After cleaning up the mess of hair from the counter and sink, he takes some hair product and quickly works it through his hair, pulling it out of his face. An errant chunk falls over his forehead, but he can't find it in himself to care too much, somewhat enjoying the Clark Kent curl. As he’s finishing with his hair, he pauses as he realizes he hasn't put this much work into his appearance in a while. It makes him question why he's decided now of all times to do so. Is it because of the event itself? It is a social gathering of immortal vampires… Or is it because he's accompanying Hannibal? The psychiatrist has a reputation to uphold, and he hardly wants to be the one to jeopardize what he's spent thousands of years building.

He roughly rubs his hands over his face to clear his mind, taking a deep breath as he packs away his belongings. After getting everything put together, he goes back to the bedroom and throws his things back into the bag.

As he's getting dressed, he decides to forgo the tie and leave the top buttons open. As he thinks about this decision, he laughs, because it makes him think that flashing his neck like that could be considered teasing. A room full of blood-suckers that can stare at his neck but can never have a taste, it’s almost cruel. He takes a moment to appreciate the suit jacket, a cherry red lining the breast pocket to accent the darker colors of the ensemble. After taking one look at the waistcoat, he resolves not to wear it. Hannibal may wear them on a daily basis, but he’s never been too fond of them. He places it back on the hook then proceeds to finish dressing.

After adding the rest of the accessories as well as the shoes, the last thing he puts on is the watch, walking out of the room as he adjusts the tightness. It’s obviously a very expensive timepiece, he’d be scared to ask just how much it cost on its own, let alone the whole outfit.

He checks the time on his wrist as he comes out towards the living room, commenting that they only have about forty-five minutes before they need to be there. When he’s met with silence he looks up to see Hannibal is sitting in one of the chairs by the window, his face is frozen, but there's an admiration practically glowing in his eyes. He takes in the sight of his human companion slowly and carefully, appreciating the personal touches he made.

If Hannibal were a religious man, now would be the time he would drop to his knees in prayer. This man before him would become the god he would worship without hesitation. He would willingly sacrifice every living creature in his power to prove his devotion to this deity. In his mind's eye Hannibal can see the beautiful mercy he would invoke upon those around him, the true wrath he would rain from above like hellfire. He would be soaked to the bone in the blood of his enemies, protective and possessive of those under his command, the

blood turned black in the moonlight as he took his trophy for himself. Awarding himself with the righteous flesh of the sinners who would dare oppose him in all of his glory.

Hallelujah, amen.

He relaxes his face into a small smirk as he stands. “If I’d known of the striking man hiding beneath, I would have invited you to an event far sooner.”

Will raises an eyebrow. “Is that the only reason?” He jokes, straightening the cuff of his suit over the watch before relaxing, his hands naturally slipping into the suit pockets.

“Hardly, but I can’t deny it’s one of many.” He steps closer, close enough to straighten the lapels of his suit jacket.

There's a moment of fluster in the shorter man’s stare, a slight hesitation as his eyes glue themselves to Hannibal's chest, not wanting to catch his direct gaze.

“If I’ve made you uncomfortable I apologize, that was not my intention.” He takes a small step back, Will immediately looking up to him in surprise.

“What- no, no. You’re fine- it’s fine.” He stutters, rubbing the back of his neck. “I’m just not used to..”

“Being complimented?” Hannibal asks with a hint of amusement in his tone. “It’s understanding, considering your previous lifestyle.” He comments, casually strolling back towards the windows to give Will a bit more space. “You purposely keep yourself out of the limelight, sticking to the shadows in hopes of avoiding contact with others. You’ve spent the majority of your life ridiculed by those who don't understand, so you don't give them the chance to.”

He glances at the reflection of the man behind him in the window who seems to have relaxed a bit, though he can tell by his face he’s not pleased by the analysis. Will takes a deep breath

before stepping up to the window next to the older man, his eyes scanning over the city lights below. “Yet, for some reason, you still managed to notice me.”

Hannibal turns from the window towards his companion, not hiding the admiration in his eyes. “Because you allowed me the chance.”

He scoffs, a small smile on his face. “You fought hard for it, it seemed only fair.” He glances into maroon eyes before looking out the window again. “You don’t treat me as incompetent or pity me, at least not visibly, and unlike most, you seem genuinely interested in me as a person and not just what I can do.”

Hannibal finally gives him a soft smile of his own. “Your flattery knows no bounds.”

“Not flattery, just the truth.” He glances at his watch once more. “I’ve never been quite as skilled at constructing poetry as you.”

Hannibal turns from the window, offering his arm to Will. “Shall we be off then?”

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> Thanks so much to Penser_Trop for beta reading this chapter! You worked so quickly and I'm super duper thankful! I hope you all enjoy this new chapter! Lots of love ❤️❤️❤️
>
> Kudos keep Will sane at the party and comments ensure Hannibal doesn't let that happen hehe.

Will allows himself one last deep breath before the elevator doors open with a silent hiss of hydraulics. Hannibal spares the smaller man a quick longing glance before stepping out, Will's arm looped through his. The floor had been decorated with a long burgundy carpet that branched from the elevator down two hallways and towards what must be the entrance to the ballroom. A couple of small groups stand to the sides of the halls conversing amicably, everyone dressed impeccably. Even after taking the time he did and wearing what Hannibal had chosen, Will still felt underdressed compared to the lavish decor around him. Though, he's sure he could be dressed like a king and still feel inadequate surrounded by these people.

Hannibal gives a small reassuring pat to his arm with his other hand as he leads them towards the large double doors. As they approach, he leans in closer, whispering a warning into Will’s ear. “Prepare yourself, for tonight we enter the den of lions.”

The official-looking men standing on either side immediately bow to them in a show of respect, opening both doors wide in a grand gesture. The first thing that Will sees is a large chandelier hanging from the high ceiling and glittering with refracted glares, the room filled with light that glistens off of expensive golden decor and fine jewelry worn by those present at the event. The room is decorated in white translucent drapery spanning across the roof, rich deep reds mixed in as well to contrast the golds and whites. Tables decorated similarly with dark cloths and rich centerpieces are scattered across the outskirts of the room, a string band playing music that flows through the room elegantly.

As soon as they enter, eyes begin to turn to them, conversations stilling one by one as their presence is acknowledged. As soon as their eyes make contact with the vampire, their gazes are turned to the ground in submission.

~

“What should I expect tonight?” Will asks as they venture the hallway towards the elevator, his eyes lingering on the fine suit his companion has chosen for the evening.

The loop on his arm tightens minutely before relaxing. "Ah yes, a proper warning this time?" His voice is light, almost teasing.

Will nods, his mind recalling what happened when they entered the hotel earlier that day. "Should I look forward to all eyes on us again?"

"Not on you, of course," Hannibal responds with a voice sounding much more serious as they approach the lift, pressing the button, "but yes."

The door opens quickly, no one else within. Hannibal escorts his companion into the lift, letting go of his arm to instead press lightly at his lower back. Once inside he presses the button for the lower floor, relaxing as he turns to Will.

"When we enter the room, the attention will be temporarily on us, but only for a moment. There are traditions observed at gatherings such as this that may not be practiced in the privacy of a home meeting, such as we had with the Vergers." Hannibal begins, Will watching the man carefully. "When an old blood, specifically one older than yourself enters the room, respect is shown in a sign of supplication by bowing their head and turning it to the side to bare their throats."

Will's eyes widen in surprise. "That's…"

"You shall never do as such to anyone, am I understood? For you to act in this manner is to offer yourself to them." Hannibal's voice turns stern at the command, relaxing at the nod he receives from the human.

~

Will watches in awe as a wave of vampires in the room shift hair or collars from their flesh, turning their heads at a slight angle. Many attempt eye contact with the vampire, some not letting him from their sight. It's far faster than he expected, only taking a couple of seconds for the practice to take place before they return to their previous conversations, the volume quickly returning to where it was previously.

Will looks up to the older man as they step further into the room, Hannibal leading them off towards one of the sides. As they approach a small group standing there, an older woman smiles.

"Ah, Dr. Lecter! What a pleasure to see you!" She grins, Hannibal taking her gloved hand in his and pressing a kiss to the knuckles.

"A pleasure to see you once more Mrs. Komeda." He offers a small smile as he relinquishes his hold on her hand, gesturing to Will beside him. "Allow me to introduce you to my companion Will Graham. Will, this is Mrs. Komeda."

"The pleasure is all mine. The word of your companion traveled fast, but not one word of how handsome he is." She laughs, those included in the conversation joining in.

"No husband this evening?" Hannibal asks, subtly changing the subject.

“Afraid not, as per usual. He abhors the social side of meetings like this.” She sighs, obviously feigned.

“That’s precisely why he married you,” Hannibal quips, earning a round of laughter from the group. Even Will has to admit the quip was rather pointed.

She finally turns to Will who is still holding onto the doctor’s arm. “If I may ask, how long have you known the good doctor?”

“A while now, I suppose. We met through work.” Will looks up to Hannibal, attempting to gauge his reaction. Is he sharing too much, or is she trusted enough to tell her these things?

“Yes, I was asked to consult on a case by a mutual acquaintance,” Hannibal answers.

“Ah, so you’re a doctor as well?” She asks, intrigued as she twirls her wine glass in her hand.

“FBI, actually,” Hannibal responds for him, Will internally sighing in relief.

Will was a bit nervous in the beginning, not looking forward to spending the night socializing. He knows how to act social, and on occasion can genuinely enjoy it, but it’s rare. He realizes early on, though, that he dodged a bullet having come with Hannibal. Not only is he a perfect gentleman, but he’s willing to deflect attention from the human. Will is pretty sure there’s a mix of possessiveness behind it as well, but he’s too relieved to analyze it too much. He is still aware of the conversations, occasionally taking part, but since he hasn’t been introduced most of them won’t make any attempts to converse with him anyways. He almost wishes that rule existed in real life.

The next hour passes quickly, Will barely realizing it’s been so long until Hannibal makes a comment about it as they venture away from the group. “How are you faring? Enjoying yourself?”

Will looks from the floor to his companion, looking at his strong cheekbones but still able to see the concern in his eyes. He’s actually worried about him, the feeling warming his cheeks. “Actually, I am.” His eyes fall back to the path before them as Hannibal leads them on a slow walk around the room, offering a small reprieve from the larger group. “I appreciate you taking the brunt of the dialogue.”

“It’s not a problem. I recognize your lack of desire to be the center of the conversation.” Hannibal speaks carefully, watching his friend with the same level of thought.

Will scoffs with a small smirk on his lips. “That ‘no touchy the human’ rule is pretty handy.”

Hannibal can’t help but quirk his own lip at the jeer. “It is rather convenient.”

A waiter with a tray balanced at shoulder level approaches them, offering glasses of what appears to be wine. He accepts one for himself, Will taking one as well.

Will waits until the waiter has left to speak, watching as Hannibal swirls and sniffs the drink. “So, after this party is over, what happens next?”

Hannibal pauses for a moment, looking at the wine carefully before taking a sip, hiding a satisfied grin behind the glass. “This is merely for us to reacquaint ourselves, perhaps create new agreements between territories. Purely political.”

“Of course it can’t all be fun and games, has to be some sort of agenda.” Will sighs, bringing the drink to his lips.

Hannibal’s eyes follow the bob of Will's throat as he swallows, deep satisfaction in his chest. He briefly wonders if Will can taste that hidden note in the wine, if the time and effort he’s spent feeding the man has successfully elevated his senses to be able to detect it. The vampire can’t help but lick his own lips at the lingering tang, watching his face for any sort of reaction.

Will tilts his head slightly as he looks at the glass, slight confusion in his eyes. “Do you taste that too?”

The taller man’s chest hums once more with pride. “Yes, that added steely hint?” He asks. “It happens commonly when the fruit is grown in very iron-rich soils.”

“I’m sure you must prefer it since it almost tastes like someone added blood to it.” Will jokes, taking another small sip.

Hannibal can no longer withhold his smile as he continues to watch the human. “Something like that.”

As Will looks over the crowd, his eyes immediately stop on a short figure not too far across the room. He almost chokes on his wine when he realizes where he recognizes him from. “Is that Leslie Jordan? Is he seriously a vampire?” There’s heavy disbelief in his voice as he looks from the sighted celebrity to Hannibal.

“Afraid not, simply a well respected human companion. However, I’m rather disappointed to not see Paul Rudd here tonight,” Hannibal comments as he continues to lead them towards the tables along the outskirts of the main floor.

Will’s eyes immediately snap to his, trying to gauge if he’s joking or not. Hannibal’s face reveals nothing, so he adds that to his mental list of things to ask him about later. He stops as they approach a table.

“If you would like, you are welcome to take reprieve here for a moment. You should remain unbothered by anyone not already properly introduced,” Hannibal offers, Will nodding as the vampire pulls out a chair.

“Thanks. Just a few minutes would be nice.” Will sighs, not realizing how much he really wanted to sit down until after he had. “I don’t want you to feel like you’re babysitting me…”

Hannibal understands the trailing words, looking at Will in concern. “Are you sure?”

Will nods, offering a small reassuring smile. “Yeah, I’ll only be a few minutes.”

“Of course. I shall remain close and visible while you rest,” Hannibal offers, silently promising his protection before returning to a group nearby.

Taking a deep breath, he allows himself to relax, checks his watch, and slowly sips his wine. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Hannibal listening calmly to something being said by a visually older man. He says visually because there’s no way he’s been alive longer than Hannibal.

There’s still a good amount of mystery surrounding Hannibal, something he would like to uncover soon. How old he is really, how he got turned, maybe dig into some of his past lives to learn more about what all through history he’s experienced. Ancient Rome, Victorian Europe, colonizing America, there’s no telling how any important historical events he was able to witness in person.

He becomes so lost in thought, unintentionally staring at his companion in the process, that he doesn’t realize it when someone approaches him.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> Super big thank you to Pender_trop once again for beta reading! I really appreciate it! I know this chapter is a little short, but I promise we are working up to the good stuff! I've gone back to working full time and I admit it's made it hard to find time to write, but I've got a few written in advance until I can get a system established.
>
> I hope you all enjoy the new chapter!

Will startles slightly at the unfamiliar voice, his mind immediately whirring in panic with alarm bells going off.He quickly glances at the young man, barely older than a boy, before averting his gaze back to the table.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.” The blonde quickly apologizes in a quiet tone. “I saw you sitting here all alone and thought you could use some company.”

Will is at a loss for words. No vampires should be able to speak to him-

Wait.

His gaze raises to the boy’s face, eyes instantly catching the obvious pink gleam of a scar peeking above the collar of his shirt silk. A bite scar. “You’re not one of them.” He states, more to himself than the other.

He seems surprised, then after a moment of realization, his face relaxes. “This must be your first time, huh? Human companions don’t need to be officially introduced. That rule is exclusively for our safety as well as keeping everyone else in check.” He offers with renewed energy and a placating smile, Will returning it.

“Yeah, it is, and he never said anything about that.” Will sighs, offering a glare at said mans back. That’s another thing added to the ‘ask later’ list that seems to be steadily growing.

“Now I understand. Sorry again for scaring you, not knowing that, and having someone unknown approach you would freak me out too.” He apologizes again, nervously rubbing the back of his neck.

“It’s fine,” Will reassures before taking a closer look at the boy. “Will Graham.”

He immediately perks up, offering his own hand to shake. “Benjamin Oliver. You can call me Benji, though.” The smile he gives is almost blinding in its intensity, sunshine beaming off of this kid in waves.

Will shakes his hand, gesturing to the table. “You’re welcome to take a seat if you’d like.” He offers, intrigued by this bravery. There’s a lot of questions bouncing around in his head, and he might be able to finally get some answers if this ‘Benji’ isn’t scared off first.

“Actually, there’s an area specifically closed off for human companions, we can go there instead!” He exclaims happily, taking Will's hand and pulling him from his chair.

He stumbles a bit in his surprise but follows along. As they venture along the wall, he looks back to Hannibal who seems content to let him be dragged away, not even glancing in his direction. But actually, Hannibal did look, just when the human wasn’t aware. He saw the blonde man approach, saw how easily he acclimated himself to Will before hauling him away to what he presumes is the other room. He would know right away if something were to happen, the scent of Will’s blood practically engraved into the very walls of his mind, so he’ll allow his companion a change of scenery. It’s hardly fair to have him seated in a corner for the remainder of the evening. Besides, this could create some interesting circumstances for the rest of the night, who’s to say the drivel can’t be entertaining?

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see the humans quickly working their way through the herd of people, staying towards the walls to avoid the majority of the crowd. Hannibal makes sure to keep a portion of his attention focused on them until Will is safe within the presence of other humans. He allows just a bit of his focus to remain on Will's position, the back of his mind already reserved for the man.

Will is led to a giant heavy wood double door, large decorative (hopefully fake) elephant tusks frame the lower portion of the door. An equally large man stands guard to the side of the entrance, the side closest to him open. When they get close he eyes them warily, not moving to speak or restrict them as they pass by. Benji stops just before the vampire, giving him their names and waiting for a nod before entering.

“He’s there to make sure none of the others wander in, this room is reserved just for humans,” Benji explains, slowing once they are inside. “He’s the only one allowed inside, and that’s only to retrieve one of us if we’re being summoned. That’s why he needs our names.”

He leads Will to a table towards the back of the room, the entire way he can see people looking up at him. Even among the humans in a building full of vampires, he’s still the odd one. They sit at a small pub table along the wall, someone in a waiter uniform approaching them. When asked if he wants a drink, he refuses, taking a moment to look around this room he’s been dragged into while the kid orders.

The room is similarly decorated to the main ballroom, but with a smaller and cozier feel. Less sharp golden decor and more personal and comfortable touches on the furnishings. The main room has a much more formal atmosphere, more light golden detailing to accentuate the extravagance of the event. This offshoot is much smaller, about the size of Hannibal's office, with a deeper wine color just as lavish as the ballroom. A small bar is set in the opposite corner of the space with lounge seating scattered throughout.

“Usually at events like this, we get shown off by our sponsors for about an hour, then retreat in here.” Benji comments as the waitress leaves. “Most events have at least a room where we

can go to relax, none of us are interested in politics so there's no reason for us to be out there."

Will grimaces. "Other than to be paraded around like animals."

Benji looks at him with wide eyes before relaxing into his seat. "You'll get used to it." After Will doesn't make an effort to respond, he joins him in looking around the room. "Did you grow a second head when I wasn't looking?"

This gets the man's attention, Will turning to him in confusion. "What?"

The blonde leans in a bit, a small section of hair falling just above his eye. "Everyone is staring at you."

Will internally groans. He really didn't need the kid to reaffirm his fears. "Yeah, that happens." He sighs, taking a moment to look at the boy before him once more. "You sound like you've been doing this for a while."

The waitress returns with his drink, quickly striding off without a second glance. Will looks and realizes it must be soda. "I've been coming to events like this for a few years since I was fifteen."

Will can't hide the shock on his face. "How old are you now?"

"I just turned eighteen last month." He answers calmly, taking a sip of his drink.

If Will had a drink, he would have choked on it. Once he looks around again, he realizes that there are quite a few people in the room that are younger, most of them appearing to be in their early twenties. "How did you get roped into this?" He gestures generally towards the door in reference to the party happening around them.

"Well, some stuff happened when I was younger. Raph heard about my situation and offered to help and take me in, in exchange, I come to events like this with him." His face is saddened at first but rises when he mentions the vampire he came with. "He takes good care of me, and honestly these aren't so bad once you get used to them." Will nods in understanding, his eyes briefly wavering to the mark on his neck again. "Oh, that?" Benji asks as he shuffles his shirt collar to better cover it. "We have a… close relationship."

Will offers a tight-lipped smile. "You seem happy, and your relationship is none of my business." He appeases, palms up.

"What about you? Have you known your sponsor for a while?" Benji asks, Will thinking for a moment on how to answer.

"Yeah, we met through a mutual acquaintance at work." He answers, wanting to keep it vague until he has more solid confirmation from Hannibal. "We're only about an hour or two away from the mall that was attacked, so we were right in the middle of the...outbreak." He chooses the word due to the lack of a better one.

Benji offers a small gasp in shock. "That is so scary!"

“I was attacked, but he managed to save me. I've been staying with him since.” Will adds, not sure why he felt the need to justify why he was living with Hannibal.

“I’m glad you’re okay.” Benji sighs, his hand tightly clenched to his chest. “You say you’re close to where the outbreak started. Isn’t that near the Lecter territory?” He asks quietly like he’s nervous to be overheard.

Will watches the boy closely. “It is. Why?”

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> Huge, mega, ginormous thanks to Pender_trop for beta reading this out so quickly! You are so amazing and wonderful and I appreciate you more than I can put into words <3 <3.

Hannibal waits for a bit before politely excusing himself from the conversation. Honestly, he couldn't care less about all of the complaints he's heard tonight. All anyone has to voice is issues about technology affecting the ability to hunt and concerns about the event back home. The second one is understandable, not only because it is a genuine issue, but that is what this entire gathering is about, after all.

He carefully weaves his way through the crowd, offering a few fleeting greetings to a few others as he passes. A couple of times he's roped into a quick conversation, but it doesn't take long for him to reach the room his dearest Will had been taken into. At his approach, the guard straightens in his position, alerting the man already speaking to him of his presence.

The other guest turns, revealing a man caught in his mid-thirties, dark skin with pitch-black hair arranged into careful wide curls that are pulled into a loose ponytail at the nape of his neck, a few pieces falling around his face in a predetermined style. "Ah, greetings." He offers a small bow, obviously not recognizing the old blood before him as the guard behind him quickly bares his throat as expected, though this goes unseen to the guest.

"Good evening." Hannibal offers a nod of his own to the man, a small amused smirk on his lips, before turning to the guard.

The dark-haired man fixes his attention on the guard as well. "If you could summon Benjamin Oliver for me, I would be very grateful."

The guard turns to Hannibal. "William Graham as well. Thank you."

The bouncer nods, turning to enter the room, the two men left to wait outside.

"Tonight has certainly been entertaining." The other man offers in an attempt to begin a conversation.

Hannibal almost wants to laugh at the lackluster choice of topic. "Indeed. It will be a shame to return to the serious matter at hand tomorrow."

He is pleasantly surprised to see Will being led out along with the blonde boy he had gone in with. My, this truly is a small world after all. They continue to speak, Will commenting something unheard to him which results in the boy laughing as they exit. As soon as the

blonde looks at the oldest vampire, his face falls serious. He quickly shuffles over to the unknown vampire, standing just behind him.

Will is, of course, confused, turning to Hannibal and raising his brow, as if expecting Hannibal to explain what he did to scare the boy.

“Did you enjoy yourself?” Hannibal asks, watching Will’s expression carefully.

“Actually, yeah. Though, I do have some questions for you.” The human's voice is accusing, not angry yet not pleased either.

“Of course.” Hannibal agrees, both of them looking up when they see the other man approach.

“It seems our companions have enjoyed each other's company for the evening.” The younger vampire comments, eyes flicking briefly between Benji and Will. Not long enough to be considered a look so much as gesturing between them.

Will can see a fraction of a millisecond of hesitation in Hannibal’s eyes at the action, but he knows no one else would have seen it, he wouldn’t have if he hadn’t been specifically looking for it. “Indeed they have.”

The other man offers his hand, a smile on his face. Will watches Benji closely, noticing the way his eyes refuse to leave his shoes, once his eyes flick up to Will, then to Hannibal as if gesturing towards him. “Raphiel Flores. A pleasure to meet you. My shy friend is Benji.” He pointedly looks to the boy who slowly lifts his eyes to Hannibal's chest before nodding in greeting.

Will is concerned by the 180° on his personality, he’s the complete opposite of the excited young man he met minutes ago. “Greetings. I am Hannibal Lecter, this is my guest for the evening, Will Graham.”

Benji’s eyes go wide as they lock with Will's. He pointedly avoided telling him who he was with during the conversation, fearing this exact reaction from the kid. Raphiel seems equally shocked to realize who he was speaking with, quickly pouring out apologies as he bowed his head to bare his throat as necessary.

“I apologize for not realizing sooner who you are, I haven’t yet had the satisfaction of meeting you,” He comments as he straightens, Benji still halfway hiding behind him.

Now with proper permission granted, Hannibal takes a moment to observe the scared boy. He notes the eye contact shared between the humans, the blonde attempting some sort of silent communication. There’s fear in his gaze, but not for himself. “It seems as though your companion is quite aware.” He notes, the blondes gaze flickering back to his shoes.

“I’m sorry about him. He can see and feel auras,” Raphiel explains, carefully patting his shoulder.

“Ah, I see. I’m sure tonight must be quite overwhelming, for that, I apologize,” Hannibal offers kindly, resting a hand on Will’s back.

“It’s not your fault, it can be a little hard on him sometimes.” The younger vampire is gently rubbing Benji’s back now, supportive but not making any moves to pull him from the situation.

Hannibal looks down at Will who is focusing intensely on his newly formed friend. “I completely understand.”

That comment gets Will to look up, concern still lingering for his friend, but a calm washes over him when his eyes lay on the vampire next to him. His focus is quickly shifted back to Benji when he hears the human quietly speak.

The blonde's eyes don’t meet Hannibals, but they fall close to his chest area. “I’m sorry for taking him away like that, I should have sought proper permission.” He bows, his eyes quickly back on the floor.

“All is forgiven, I could hardly feel offense when my dear Will is enjoying himself,” Hannibal answers with a small smile, his hand gently stroking the human’s back.

“Was there something you needed?” Will asks, his voice low and directed towards Hannibal.

The taller man slips closer, lowering his head to Will’s ear. “Simply wished to check-in to see how you are faring, and inquire if you needed anything.”

Will can feel the warm, unnecessary breath on his earlobe, sending shivers down his spine. “I’m fine… Thank you,” He answers, for lack of a better response.

While they are having their little moment, another vampire approaches to retrieve their human, stopping to speak to Raphiel while he waits. They pay no attention to Hannibal and Will, but Hannibal is very much aware of them. He can hear Raphiel speaking to his blonde companion about what just happened. Even he is aware there’s something more to the boy's reaction than just a frightening aura. He's in a room full of ancient vampires, if that were, in fact, the case he would be reacting much stronger to the other auras around them and not just Hannibal's.

Will pulls away slightly to look at the human, his mouth opening and closing a couple of times before he decides not to voice what is clearly on his mind. Hannibal chooses to respect his decision and flawlessly includes them in the new conversation.

After watching the vampires converse for a moment, Will looks back at Benji, who has calmed somewhat but is still giving worried looks to Will. He’s able to slip away from Hannibal, grabbing the other human and pulling him off to the side a bit. “What’s going on?”

Benji immediately grabs his arms, turning their backs to the group. “Oh my god, I can't believe you’re here with him!”

Will watches as the boy practically folds in on himself in his fear. “Hannibal? Why are you so scared of him? Did he do something to you?”

“He’s dangerous, Will, you don’t even know.” The blonde’s eyes shoot up to meet his, the contact is alarming for Will. He almost has to take a step back from him when the strong wave of pure anxiety and fear flood over him.

After taking a moment to steel himself, he forces himself to ask the question he wishes he didn’t have to. “Why should I be scared of him?”

Benji freezes as tears build in his eyes before he squeezes them shut and looks away. “He’s a monster.” His lip trembles as he attempts to take a deep breath. “You don’t know- haven’t heard the stories.”

“What stories?” He asks, his mind flickering with thoughts of his conversation with Margot. “He’s thousands of years old, not to mention he’s a creature that feeds off of human-”

“Most people have some sort of color around them in their aura, colors that represent the kind of person they are. Vampires are the same, but slightly darker like it’s covered in a black veil. It gets larger the more powerful they are, but not darker.” His eyes jump briefly to the man as if to confirm his thoughts before turning back to Will. “He’s not just any old blood,” Benji shakes his head, his voice trembling. “His aura is pitch black and all-consuming.”

Will wants to ask more but stops when he hears Raphiel calling for the boy. “Dr. Lecter has suggested we shift from the doorway, which I agree with. We’ve decided to move to a table to relax.”

Benji gives Will one more scared look before nodding and following his companion off to the side to wait for them. It’s after he’s been led away from them that Hannibal approaches, looking between them but speaking quietly. “He seems rather frightened.”

Will looks at Hannibal carefully, actually looks. Their eyes meet in totality for the first time in a very long time, and he lets out a long exhale when he sees the familiar golden pendulum swing behind his eyes. He allows himself to sink into the deep maroon, the bloody tone rising around him as the room goes black, but he doesn’t drown. It calmly floods to his chest, caressing his skin in warmth. Will can feel the tight grip around his ribs as if someone is standing behind him to hold him close, a protective position. He closes his eyes, relishing in the comfort of such unabashed adoration and complete *possession* radiating off of the figure. His head lolls backward, resting in what feels like the crook between neck and shoulder.

Slowly his eyes open, seeing the spread of black antlers above him. It’s almost invisible compared to the consuming blackness of the sky above. He doesn’t feel scared, though. His mind is flooded with that reminder of danger, the sharp tines of the antlers dripping the deep red liquid he wades in onto his face, but those natural bone daggers are not pointed at him. They are above and in front of him, a shield at his back and a weapon at his front. They do not endanger him but protect him on all sides.

When Will blinks again, a golden light swinging in front of his face, he’s momentarily blinded by the light surrounding him compared to the darkness he just plummeted into. His

gaze focusses on Hannibal once more, the feel of warm skin against his jaw helping to ground him. “Dear Will.” The warm timbre of his voice is dripping with honeyed adoration and sweetness.

Will doesn’t say anything, closing his eyes once more and leaning into the contact. His neck is bared to him in the exact manner he was forbidden to. When his eyes open once more they are heavily lidded, that lingering pureness of caring and protection still tingling across his skin. He looks to those pools of maroon once more, but they have been flooded with the heavy darkness of his pupils.

Will takes a deep breath, having to place a hand on Hannibal’s arm to steady himself as he pulls his head back upright. “What did you see?” The older man asks calmly, not making any move to release his hold on Will’s cheek.

Chills run down his spine at the reverence in the whispered words, he has to take another shaky breath to steady himself. “Blood, a river of it up to my chest. It was all spilled for me. It cocooned me.”

A small smirk graces Hannibal’s lips for only a second. “A protective layer. What is it protecting you from?”

Will’s eyes flicker across Hannibal's face once more. “From… being seen by those not deemed worthy.”

The smirk spreads into a grin as he shifts millimeters closer to Will. “With all my knowledge and intrusion, I could never entirely predict you. I can feed the caterpillar, whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.”

Breath is shared between them for a moment like time has stopped between them, they float in their own muddy flow of seconds. Hannibal speaks, breaking the staring contest between them. “I believe our friends are waiting for us.”

Will takes a step back, nodding slowly as he pulls himself together. When they start to move towards them, Will apologizes for his moment of pause. “I’m sorry, sometimes I can get lost in my own head.

He can see the concerned look from the other human, fear almost palpable on Will’s tongue. It sours his taste buds from the sweet heady flavor he was just indulged in seconds ago.

Hannibal offers a placating smile to those standing there, gesturing towards the table along the edge of the room. “Shall we?”

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> Hello there! I beta read this one myself, so any mistakes are my own. I hope you enjoy this chapter! I love reading some of the theories you have come up with, honestly, they make my day.
>
> Kudos give Will a hug, comments give Hannibal one. (You'll understand)

They’re sitting at the table for almost an hour before the announcement comes. Hannibal and Raphiel pretty much carry the conversation, a couple of others joining in as well. Will doesn’t get another chance to speak to Benji, but his refusal to lift his eyes from his shoes makes it impossible to even have a silent conversation.

All eyes jump up to the front doors when the light ringing of the bell begins, it sounds ominously like a dinner bell. Slowly the large ornate doors open and in comes a stream of people, but Will can’t see too much from where they sit. A voice speaks up as they all fall silent, a few people cooing at those who just came in like prized show animals. He recognizes the main voice as that of Bedelia Du Maurier, the head of the Council. He swiftly realizes he hasn’t actually seen any of the council members tonight, whether or not that is on purpose is entirely up to debate.

“Many thanks to those of you who were able to come on such short notice. Tomorrow we begin the business side of this gathering, but tonight we reacquaint ourselves and perhaps even make new acquaintances. We have reached the peak of the evening, so now we feast.” The sounds of others speaking quickly fills the room once more, Bedelia seemingly disappearing back into the crowd.

“Feast?” Will asks, looking to Hannibal who has his usual mask in place, not allowing Will to glean any answers from his face alone.

Raphiel answers Will's inquiry instead with a jolt of excitement. “Yes, the feeders. It’s commonplace at an event such as this.”

Will's eyes widen as he looks between the two vampires. From the corner of his eye, he can see new people slowly working their way through the herd of bloodsuckers that fill the room. He can see one of these new people, a young girl no older than Benji, stroking her hand across a man's chest, leaning bodily into him with her neck bared seductively. He has to look away, but he can practically hear the tear of her flesh resonate in his ears.

"I thought they gave you blood bags and such." Will sighs, keeping his gaze to those at the table.

"They do, but some older bloods refuse anything but fresh. There's a definite taste difference." Raphiel answers once again.

"They are bred to be fed off of." Will finally looks up from the table at Benji's low voice from across the table. "It's a lucrative side business for the Verger family, they provide them for the events and also sell them privately."

Will is silent in shock at the words and the look of sadness on the boy's face, and that's when he realizes it. The apprehension sends a sick wave of nausea through his stomach, the bile rising through his esophagus threatening to escape. Benji was born to be a feeder and he was bought by Raphiel.

Hannibal seems to come to the same conclusion, but he doesn't seem nearly as bothered by this revelation. "Some choose not to partake in these unfamiliar offerings. It's another reason human companions are so commonplace." Hannibal responds.

Will, as casually as he can, turns towards the doors leading towards the companion lounge, humans flooding out at the sound of the bell as if trained to emerge when they hear the resonating ring. They all seem bored as if this is so common they've become desensitized to it, it probably is for them. A Pavlovian response. "They come to be fed off of, then return to the cage like a good little pet," Will grumbles under his breath, not wanting the other human at the table to hear.

"What will you be choosing tonight, Dr. Lecter?" Raphiel asks as he slides a hand down Benji's side. Will can see the blush slowly blooming across the boy's flesh, his body slowly sliding closer towards his sponsor.

Will can’t bear to watch and instead flicks his gaze towards the doctor, their gazes locking onto each other. “I’m still unsure. What do you think, Will?”

Will is stunned by the question, the anger rising with the bile in his throat. “Excuse me?”

Hannibal doesn’t move, his face not changing. In his periphery, he can see Benji shifting onto Raphiel’s lap, the vampire’s face buried into his hair. “I am giving you a choice, shall I partake in the flesh offered to me, or do you offer your own in exchange?”

A quiet such as that of a dinner table slowly creeps over the room, a few muffled conversations here and there throughout the space, but most are occupied by their feeding. “I-” He’s cut off by a hushed moan across the table, his eyes clenching to avoid looking. He’s not sure if he would be able to look away if he risked a glance.

A grasp of his chin directs his gaze, his eyes opening once more to look at Hannibal. He doesn’t speak, waiting patiently for an answer. Will feels the disgust building in his chest, pushing against his skin and boiling beneath its flesh containment.

He finally makes a decision, pushing away Hannibal’s hand, probably with more force than necessary, and walks from the table. There’s no call of his name, no hands grabbing him to stall his escape, just his feet moving him swiftly across the room. He keeps his eyes forward, looking but not seeing, caught somewhere in the middle distance in front of him. He doesn’t allow himself to process what’s happening around him, allows his legs to carry him out of the room. The door is opened for him, but not without earning some odd looks from the men up front.

He calls for the elevator, able to climb on without any issues. He looks out to the lobby as the doors close, his anger simmering into something darker at the emptiness. It only upsets Will more, but not because Hannibal’s not there. He’s mad at himself for expecting anything more than what’s happened tonight.

Slumping against the wall he scrubs his hands over his face, beginning to question why he agreed to this whole charade in the first place. That’s all this trip has been, a facade of civility

for the monsters. A chance for beasts to gather to fulfill their sick desires while feigning the humanity that they feed on.

As soon as the elevator opens he's out, quickly striding down the hall towards their room. He pulls his room key from the hidden pocket inside his jacket before reaching the door. It takes a couple of tries, Will having to take a deep breath to keep from just breaking the damn thing. Once he's in, he slams the door behind him, but it doesn't offer the loud bang he was hoping for. Instead, he hears a muffled fleshy thud.

Will's head snaps around to see Hannibal entering the room, gently closing the door behind himself. "Will-"

"No," Will growls, running his fingers through his hair to tug on the strands. "don't 'Will' me. Fucking preternatural speed." He grumbles the last bit to himself, stomping into the living room, Hannibal hot on his trail.

Will whips back around once they've reached the open area, giving himself space. "What the hell was your plan here, Hannibal? The amount of shit you've neglected to tell me tonight is astronomical. Since we've entered Seattle you've done nothing but keep things from me."

Hannibal's face is its usual neutral mask with a hint of displeasure in the corners of his mouth as he removes his jacket to lay across the back of a chair. "Any information withheld on my part has been-"

"Been what?" Will interrupts, his voice rising further. "You wanted to bring me to this damn farce but didn't bother to tell me why humans are brought to the event in the first place?" He gestures angrily, taking a step towards the vampire. "Or how about the fact that humans are being specially bred to be party favors?"

Hannibal remains completely still, watching Will carefully. "The practice has been ongoing for centuries. Humans have been raising livestock for over ten thousand years, what makes this any different?"

Will opens his mouth to speak, snapping it shut to grind his teeth for a moment in his frustration. He turns and paces away from the older man, quickly turning and coming back to where he stood before. “Why did you ask me to come with you?”

“Because I enjoy your company.” This earns him a scoff from the human. “Is that so hard to believe?”

Will pauses, looking at Hannibal. Approaching once more, stopping about five feet away. “Don’t lie to me. Remember I saw you.”

“And what did you see? I know you omitted details, tell me what you witnessed that had you so reverent that you fell limp into my grasp.”

Will swallows the building lump in his throat. “While standing in the… in the blood, I felt something curling itself around me. An overwhelming feeling of possession and protection washed over me. Is that why you brought me, wanting to keep an eye on your new toy?”

“What was behind you?” Hannibal asks, not answering the question.

“A monster.” He remains vague, not answering in full until he receives one of his own.

Hannibal looks like he wants to sigh, but doesn’t want to waste the breath. “You are not some ‘toy’ Will. You are a friend who I care for dearly. Had I left you in Baltimore, the chances of you becoming compromised was too high.” Hannibal finally moves, putting a hand in his pocket and stepping to the side, turning from Will as she casually strolls around his human companion. “What was the monster, what did it look like?”

Will gives a disapproving snort as he crosses his arms, refusing to follow the man's movement with his eyes. His gaze settles somewhere in front of him. “Is this therapy now Dr. Lecter? Gotta calm down the hysteric patient?”

Hannibal stops and turns to him. “Are you hysteric, Will?”

Will's frown deepens, his arms uncrossing even though he still refuses to look. "Large, pitch-black like it's made out of the shadows itself. Gaunt, all sharp edges from the bones poking through, stag antlers that span upwards towards the sky." He finally glances Hannibals face carefully, catching only the slightest crack in the facade.

He can feel satisfaction leaking from his pores, washing over the room, and sending chills down his spine. Will watches as Hannibal continues his meandering, slowly working his way back over towards the entrance of the room. It's reminiscent of a predator circling his prey. Will doesn't allow himself to wither, holding his ground and staring ahead at the artwork on the wall.

"How does this… stag man make you feel? Do you fear him?"

Will smirks. "Should I? It's your beast."

"It's your mind's visualization of my beast, so to speak. You do not fear it, nor it's intentions."

"I felt no ill intention, not towards me at least. Yet your actions directly contradict that."

This stops Hannibal in his tracks, just to Will's side, three-fourths of the way around his little circle he's been casually making. "My actions have not yet led to any harm coming to you."

Will refuses to look at him, keeping his eyes forward. "Yet. How long before you would tell me the truth about what's really going on in Baltimore? I could have just as easily gone out and gotten turned, not knowing how risky it truly was. What about refusing to tell me about the feast? Someone could have mistaken me for one of the… feeders. What would you do then?"

"I'd rip their throat out with my teeth." The words come out as a growl, deep, and guttural in the vampire's chest.

Will finally looks over, Hannibal barely holding his person suit together at the mere idea of something happening to his dearest human companion. The look of tumultuous carnage in his eyes is surprisingly pleasurable to Will. The sheer satisfaction at the fact that he causes this reaction makes him smirk. He turns towards the older man, taking a single step forward.

“But it would be too late, I wouldn’t be yours anymore, would I?” Will takes another step forward, allowing their eyes to meet. “My flesh and blood would be in their mouth, down their throat, and fueling whatever short life they have left.” Hannibal glares at Will, a wordless warning to cease this foolish prodding, Will continuing to approach regardless. “You want me to stop poking you, reminding you of what you could have prevented? Use your powers, force me to stop.” Will stills just inches from Hannibal, their gazes locking in a mutual glare. “Make me.”

Will waits a moment, searching those maroon eyes before turning to exit the room. He knows the conversation isn’t done, the lingering sting of eyes in his back is sign enough of that. The satisfaction of having the last word for the moment, however, is worth it. He opens the door, glancing back to see if he decided to follow or if he plans to take a moment to calm down. Not seeing out into the hall as he steps forward means he doesn’t see the man that he slams into, both of them almost falling over.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

> Welcome back everyone! I'm so happy to be able to post a new chapter! Moving into my own place for the first time has been so nerve wracking! I'm happy to finally be pretty much settled in! All of the comments you guys left me with your support really made me feel so much better about taking the time to get it done. It means that I can put out content that I will feel good about because I'll have a better chance of actually working through it properly instead of rushing to get it out.
>
> So, I hope to return to my schedule of every other weekend for new chapters. Without further ado, enjoy! All errors are my own.

Will feels a hard shove to his chest, stumbling back a step. “Get the fuck off me!”

His eyes float up the disheveled figure of the man from the elevator earlier that day. His mind quickly provides the image of the man entering the lift just after them and the prickling of anger he felt from his inhuman companion. Before Will can even get a word out, he can feel the hairs rising on the back of his neck as an angered beast approaches behind him.

“God it’s you! Piece of shit from the elevator! Where’s your sugar daddy, huh? The only way a whore like you could get up here anyway.” He grumbles, shoving at Will’s shoulders again as he gestures erratically.

Out of the corner of his vision, he sees the familiar figure of Hannibal approaching from behind. His mask is placed as always on his face, hiding away the anger that Will can see in the tension of his shoulders. Their conversation served the purpose he wanted. He successfully pissed off Hannibal, made him feel that flair of fury that Will carries deep in his chest at his injustices. But, in doing so, he has unleashed a beast. A beast he had hoped to leave in the room behind him to stew in those injustices and feel the consequence of his absence.

“I apologize if we’ve disturbed you at all,” Hannibal speaks, his voice smooth and placating.

The guy seems to pause for a moment, unsure of how to proceed. He was likely expecting some sort of argument or fight, not the kind, albeit falsely calming, smile on the doctors face. “Yeah, well you guys are causing a ruckus. It’s like one in the fucking morning.”

Hannibal glances down at his timepiece, humming in affirmation. “It seems it is. Why don’t you come inside and allow me to apologize properly?”

Will feels panic settle deep in his lungs and shoulders as he turns to Hannibal. The man is looking at his assailant, expression blank yet polite. In his eyes, though, is the hidden disdain and disgust at the audacity of the pig standing before him. If looks could kill, the man before them would be the consistency of a viscous milkshake splattered along the walls.

Again, the man contemplates how to react to the unexpected treatment. Hannibal seems to sense that hesitation and speaks again. “I have a well-aged Brandy that I think would be to your liking.”

“Hannibal, what are you-” Will starts to ask, but the man interrupts.

“Sure, least you could do.” The man mumbles the second part more to himself as he steps past Will, following them into the room and quickly closing the door.

As soon as they have entered the room proper, Hannibal rounds on the man and grabs him by the neck. The vampire pulls the man into his chest, clamping a hand over his mouth to muffle whatever panicked yelling he attempts to get out. His legs flail around and his weak fingers scrabble at the digits covering his airway. The valiant effort made by the man is nothing to the old blood, Hannibal still as a stone at his thrashing.

“You seem to forget, dear Will, that I am not human.” Hannibal’s voice is guttural but calm, the dangerous kind that harbors no mercy for those on the other end. “No matter how I choose to present myself to prying eyes, I am myself first and foremost."

Will isn’t able to speak as he watches the shock on the human’s face. His thrashing had calmed for a moment, but now with those dangerous words, it picks up once more. The sight is bone-chilling, made even worse by Hannibal’s eyes never leaving Will’s face, even as he holds the struggling body to his chest and opens his mouth to reveal long dagger-like fangs.

“I’m disappointed Will, I thought you knew better. Perhaps you require a reminder.” Their eyes meet, Hannibal’s glowing faintly, as his teeth bury themselves in his flesh. Low humming growls resonate from Hannibal’s chest as he drinks from the man in his arms.

Will can only watch in fascination at the tableau before him, seeing familiar darkness emanating from the monster who is currently relishing in the blood of an enemy. Even watching the feast being made of his victim does not give him cause to fear Hannibal because he knows why he’s doing this.

Hannibal is keeping his promise from the airplane as he always keeps his word. He swore to Will that any slight made to him was a slight towards himself and that those who did as such would receive due punishment. This man has not only insulted them but in shoving Will he branded a target into his own skin.

And his punishment is righteous.

Hannibal drops the body to the floor with an obscene thud, Will realizing the man isn’t actually dead. The human is speechless and panting weakly on the floor, but there is a steady pulsating flow of blood from the holes in his neck. Will looks upon the mesmerizing sight of Hannibal’s vicious reckoning dripping from the corner of his mouth to land onto the fine

fabric of his waistcoat. If he breathed, he's sure Hannibal would be panting with the adrenaline pumping through his system as residual from his rage, but instead, he stands tall and proud, still as a statue. There is still fury in his eyes, but it's quickly waning as he sees Will's reaction.

Hannibal takes the first step, slowly walking closer to his friend, ignoring the body on the floor. Will slowly steps back while keeping his gaze on the predator stalking towards him. He sees deep scarlet irises quickly being swallowed by the lust-filled black of his pupils. The tension in Hannibal's muscles is tight as he moves, barely holding himself back from whatever instinct his mind is supplying him with. The feel of the cold blank wall at Will's back is anything but comforting, their gaze staying locked as the vampire boxes him in with his arms on either side of Will's head.

Will reaches forward to thumb away the small bead of liquid on his chin, bringing the appendage to the vampire's lips. He takes it into his mouth willingly, sucking lightly to remove the blood.

The human gently caresses the sharp features of his face, watching reverently at Hannibal's reaction. The man's gaze is clear and curious, wondering what Will plans to do next. "As much as I enjoyed your display, you've failed to make me fear the sight of you," Will whispers into the space between them, not wanting to break the deep-set tension that has settled there. "All you've done is endear yourself to me further."

Hannibal doesn't speak, keeping absolutely still while Will seems to memorize the structure of the old blood's face. He can feel the thrill of danger slither down his spine, Hannibal feeling something mutual. Hannibal takes a small step closer, pressing their chests together to feel that delicious warmth even more. The scent of iron and something entirely Will is so strong in this small space they've made for themselves against the wall next to the door.

After another moment of staring at each other in adrenalized silence, Will surges forward to press their lips together. There's a feeling of bliss that rolls through his body as his eyes close, savoring the taste of his soft flesh. Hannibal kisses back with renewed vigor, pulling the human's bottom lip between sharp teeth. He doesn't bite to break the skin no matter how much he wants to. There is a push and pull between them as they simultaneously attempt to devour each other.

There is a feeling of something breaking between them, some unseen force that snaps back like a rubber band. It frees up space in his lungs and allows him to loosen up and drive further into this connection of shared breath. His toes curl at the strength behind Hannibal's movements, feeling dexterous fingers curl into his chocolate-colored hair to pull him closer. Noses bump and teeth gnash against each other. This isn't meant to be some calm, romantic kiss. No, this is a claim being staked, a possessive mark upon the other.

When his eyes open once more, Hannibal's are half-lidded, looking down on him, but the lack of visual does nothing to hide the glowing red of his iris.

Will's focus on the man's eyes and lips distract him from the hand painfully gripping his hip, the feeling of the warm pressure finally catching up to him startles a laugh out of him. He pulls his finger away from Hannibal's tender mouth, his hand resting gently against his strong

neck. After another moment, Hannibal pulls away to press rough nips to his jaw and neck, Will accepting with his head down.

While his gaze is lowered, he's reminded by the lifeless body on the floor, wondering once more if he's still alive like Hannibal intentionally left him. It makes a smile press into his cheeks at the hilarity of the situation. "Will your victim of choice be an issue?"

He glances up just in time to catch a similar amusement in Hannibal's eyes before he looks towards said body. "I severely doubt. It's unlikely a man of his… personality deficit would be in this section of the hotel. He was likely planted by the council."

Will laughs, hearty and bodily with his head tipped back against the wall, his hands resting on Hannibal's chest for balance. "My God, you guys are absolutely insane."

There's a smirk on Hannibal's face as he gently brushes an errant curl from Will's face behind his ear. "I fear I have dragged you into it."

Will leans in close, his breath warm against the dried blood on the corner of his mouth. "I got here on my own, though I do appreciate the company." Before Hannibal can move in once more, Will takes the moment for the distraction that it is and side steps away from where he was pressed into the wall. "Go wash out your mouth." He smirks before stalking back over to the body in the center of the room.

From what he can see, the man is actually still alive somehow. His breaths are slow and strained, but they are enough to keep him functioning. He crouches down to press his fingers to the part of the neck not bleeding to check for a pulse. That too is weak and sporadic as if ready to give out. From the nearby half bath, he can hear the sound of running water, Hannibal taking his command in stride.

When Will stands from the half-dead man on the floor, Hannibal is coming towards him with blood washed away. Will notices there is still a small spot of red on the intricately embroidered waistcoat, but Hannibal doesn't seem concerned by it.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

> Hey everyone! Hope you enjoy the new chapter! No beta reader this time around, so any mistakes are my own!
>
> Kudos are their intertwined hands, comments are the strong breeze pressing them closer.

Bedelia looked down the walkway at the scene with disdain maring her features. From where Will was observing the hallway leading to the other guests' room, the woman instructing people to remove Hannibal's lesson, he could practically see the man preening at her displeasure. He obviously enjoys winding her up, something stemming from knowing each other for a few thousand years. The employees, obviously not associated with the hotel, load the body into a black bag that's become an all too familiar sight to conceal his identity. Will casually leans back against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest. He's actively trying to stay out of the way, a natural position for him to take. Hannibal stands just a few steps ahead, monitoring the men moving around the hallway like a hawk keeping an eye on its nest.

The blonde woman steps up to him, her arms draped at her sides. Will can still see the tension there even as she tries to collect herself. It's easy to see she has an obligation to scold, reprimand, punish, but she knows she can't do it outright. Even with that familiarity between them, Hannibal easily holds the power here. Regardless of the fact he just murdered a man, nothing she says will change anything.

"I can't help but think you enjoy making things difficult for me." Her voice is low, her words measured. None the less Will can still hear the exasperation in her tone.

Hannibal turns to her, his hands in his pockets, a smug look in his startling dark red eyes. After feeding, it seems that the coloring of his iris remains a brighter red than the whiskey brown they were earlier in the day. Now they have a much warmer rust tone to it, not enough to be inhuman, but it certainly would warrant a double-take.

"Many interests and endeavors can come and go over the span of several centuries." It was hardly a denial, Bedelia turning a small glare towards him.

"Perhaps it's time to remove 'leaving your scraps' from that list of endeavors?" Her suggestion is as blunt as she would dare be with him, it earns her a small tilt of his lips.

They watch as the body is loaded onto a gurney and wheeled from the room. People with cleaning supplies attempt to lift the small amount of blood that made its way to the floor. Personally, Will thinks his compatriot did a pretty good job of making her life easier. He avoided furniture and rugs, keeping his display to the center of the hardwood. The minuscule

splatter of red on the floor was less than an average nose bleed, let alone enough to warrant the amount of cleaning supplies being brought into the hall.

Bedelia takes a small inhale, her eyes quickly inspecting Hannibal's covered vest. Before she arrived he donned his coat once more, the cut of it expertly covering the small droplet that dripped onto his waistcoat earlier. To anyone else, he looks the picture of sophistication and resolve, you'd never guess he just sank his teeth into a man's neck and displayed him in the hallway.

If he's learned anything from Hannibal, looks can be deceiving.

"So what are your plans for the rest of this evening. Do you think you'll be returning to the festivities?" She asks, her topic transition rather smooth considering the fearful sharpness of her shoulders.

Finally, Hannibal turns to Will, the human recognizing the silent summons. He has half a mind to defy the unspoken order, add to the dangerous undertones in the room, but he finds the whim not as satisfying as seeing the pleasure spread over the man's face when he obeys. Granted, Will is pretty sure he would bear the same giddy gleam in his eyes if Will just as easily had ignored him.

Will steps up to his side, his jacket laid back over the couch in their room. It got some splatter along the sleeve and it almost hurt to think of how much more expensive it would be to clean that than the pristine floors of this damned hotel. "You look at me like I'm the deciding factor. This is your rodeo, I'm just hanging onto the reins." Will shrugs as he matches Hannibal's stance, hands in his pockets and back straight.

It's a minuscule gesture, one that Hannibal is easily able to interpret. 'I'm letting you decide, but in the end, you'd better choose wisely.' It's a power move, deviance from what anyone else would dare do to the overwhelming man.

Hannibal's eyes briefly scan over the matched posture before turning back to Bedelia who has been warily watching the entire exchange. "Perhaps we may return for a brief period, if only to see those who are not staying for the remainder of the trip off." His response is once again vague enough not to supply the woman with anything concrete, but it will suffice as an answer.

She offers a glance between the two men before excusing herself as the cleaners follow her out. They watch her go down the hall before returning to their own hotel room. The door closes softly, Hannibal pausing a moment to ponder the doorway before turning to Will. His posture remains imposing as always, but he seems to relax as he crosses his arms behind himself.

"So, what do we plan to do with the rest of our evening, Dr. Lecter?" Will asks with a smirk as he looks at the man with a quirk of his lip in amusement. "I'm aware you favor making an appearance, but we've sufficiently socialized for the night, wouldn't you say?"

Maroon eyes focus on a small space just below his ear, the man in question seems to flick his tongue over his teeth in thought. "What would you suggest, mano mile?"

Will pauses at the term of, what he would assume, endearment from the vampire. He would hardly recognize the language, the man can't use more common languages like Italian or French, languages he would actually have a chance at knowing. Their eyes meet once more, the man being surprisingly open about how he feels tonight. Multiple times their eyes have briefly met, Will only becoming comfortable with the contact because normally he would never actually pick up on anything, but it's as if Hannibal's allowed a window to open on the expansive palace that's been built within his mind. A small entrance for Will to breeze past and witness a microscopic amount of feeling from the man, a droplet of what's in store should the floodgates truly open.

His voice is tentative as he speaks, the implications of the transparent gaze sending a shiver down his spine. "What do you have in mind?"

Will allows himself to think back to Hannibal pulled close with barely room for the air between them, the shorter man's soft breaths warming the space. The only air leaving the older man coming when he speaks, his words heavy to settle over Will's heart. They filled him with a glowing light he'd never think capable by the immeasurable darkness surrounding the other man like a thick cloak.

Hannibal's hand settled on his neck, Will's hands rested on the man he believed impossible to get close to, their lips so close that a stiff wind could press them together. It's something Will could never have expected when he'd first been placed in the same room with the man at Quantico. He could have stood there forever if it would feel as free as it had, the desperate kneading of their hands spoke in a way his eyes never could.

Hannibal must be able to read what damning thoughts are fluttering across Will's as he artfully glides closer, his hand reaching up to take the younger man's fingers into his grip, pulling the knuckles to his lips to place them gently over the flesh. "A very dangerous question."

"Hopefully it comes with an intriguing answer," Will smirks, gently as he takes his hand in his own.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

> Sorry I didn't get this posted last weekend, I totally got my weekends mixed up 😅.
> Hope you enjoy!

Will and Hannibal stand there for a moment, relishing in the feel of the others touch before the human releases a sigh and removes the contact. His face falls as some sort of realization comes over him, ripping him from the comfort and excitement he seemed to feel while held by the vampire. Although reluctantly, Hannibal allows him his distance as he once more strolls further into the room and pauses by the living space. Here he can see the clicking and spinning of gears, the mechanics of Will's mind working tirelessly when he wants nothing more than to put them to ease.

"You seem troubled." He observes out loud as he approaches, remaining a few feet behind.

"I'm…" Will pauses before offering a forced humorless smile. "Morally conflicted."

This earns a raised eyebrow. "Allow me to be your sounding board, mayhaps I can be of some assistance." His suggestion seems to fall flat before him, belly-flopped onto the floor.

"Kinda hard to confirm the validity of my morals, or lack thereof, with someone who has so few himself." Will seems amused by his attack, slowly making his way towards the bar.

Deciding this conversation would be easier with the addition of alcohol, he pours himself a tumbler of whiskey. He glances back towards his conversation partner in silent question but earns a shake of the head in response. It's easy enough for Hannibal to recognize these actions as a step back, a defensive wall placed between them while Will attempts to work out this issue he seems to have conjured in his mind.

"Is this issue of the lack of morality due to my actions or yours?" He seeks out an entrance, a crack in this fort he's built that might allow him to break through once more. "The limits we place on ourselves are built as we experience and interact with the world around us. Tell me, Will, what events have shaped yours?"

Will can't help but snort at the probing his psychiatrist is attempting. If there's one thing he's learned about the man, it's that he likes to understand. He wants an inside look at how Will's mind works, just like everyone else. The only difference between his advances and the others is that he is a far better listener. Most other doctors and psychiatrists only care about his empathy, his strange ability to deduce scenes and read people. But, there's the rest of his thought processes that oftentimes go overlooked. These are where Hannibal has sunk his teeth and latched on, his red carpet entryway into the mind of Will Graham.

"I've spent the last few years steeped into a boiling pot of murder and death, occasionally spooned out by Jack to check how tender I've gotten." He takes a sip of his drink, wallowing in the flavor of fine whiskey provided by the hotel. "I think any partially sane man would have burnt away to the bone by now."

"You would consider your sanity imperiled?" He asks as he watches Will move over towards the couches in the living space.

"My… mind and how it processes would have ensured my stability volatile with enough time I'm sure." Will sighs as he looks out the window towards the water.

Hannibal carefully approaches his companion and joins him by the window, glancing out as well. The dawn will be approaching soon. "What, if you must hazard a guess, would you say has contributed the most to your continued gasp of your moral compass? What has yet kept the dial from spinning out of control?"

He can see the bout out humor that quirks Will's lips in the reflection of the glass. "Has your ego not been stroked enough tonight?" He questions before taking a sip of the drink in his hand once more. "You once told me you would be my paddle."

"And would you say I've succeeded?" Hannibal asks, genuinely intrigued by the path this has taken.

Will pauses for a moment. "This river we are paddling down is swiftly shifting directions. We've hit a split in the channel that have drastically different ends. It feels like I'm attempting to turn one way but my oar is bending through the water around me to send me towards the other. Allowing me to stay afloat while simultaneously pushing me towards a waterfall. Only the water I'm set to drown in is not the water I've chosen."

The vampire thinks on his metaphor for a time before carefully choosing his next words. "You would believe me to be flimsy in the times when you chose to stray from my intended destination? Steering you towards decisions you wouldn't make in your own time."

Will finally turns from the window, giving the psychiatrist his full attention. Even allowing their eyes to meet once more as he speaks. "I believe, if we keep to this metaphor, that you are no longer only the paddle. You have morphed yourself into the stream of blood in which I'm rapidly careening down. By your constant intervention am I somehow able to narrowly evade the jagged rocks and debris floating along beside me that you placed there."

The taller man turns bodily towards the human, carefully moving in closer. Not enough to loom over him, but enough to create that intimate space between them once more. An attempt to regain that foothold he'd made tonight. "What would you have me do instead? Allow you to crash yourself along rocks, crumbling apart until you washed up across the bank dyed crimson from your wash in the steam?" He judiciously raises a hand to place along Will's jaw, holding his gaze to prevent him from removing it. "Or flood the waterway with enough blood to ease your travels? Raise you above the dangers of your river and carry you safely down?"

Hannibal can feel the shiver that runs through the human, though their eyes are still locked in an equally intense gaze. "I have a distinct feeling you would enjoy either option." His voice is

almost a whisper as he finds himself sinking into the touch.

Both the comment and the relaxing of Will put a satisfied smile on his face. He strokes a thumb across the human's cheek as he pulls him in closer. "Immensely." He responds equally quietly as he leans closer, hovering inches away. "So long as you are surrounded by me I have no quarrels."

"You wish to entomb me? Hold me in a limbo of only you?" Will asks as his eyes bounce between Hannibal's lips and eyes.

Another smirk of pride. "Would you allow me that pleasure?"

"Why do you think I'm conflicted?"

Hannibal feels a tentative hand placed on his hip, no force to either push or pull behind it. Simply a steadying pressure. "You find difficulty with allowing yourself to accept that what you want goes against the moral restrictions you've placed upon yourself in an attempt to cling to humanity. Tell me, Will. What is it you desire that has you struggling to come to a conclusion?"

Will is silent for a moment of contemplation. His eyes leave the face of the vampire in front of him for a moment before returning with ferocity, not unlike a lion. "Drink from me."

Hannibal caresses the rough hair of his light beard as he pulls him closer. "Why? What has you so determined to receive my bite?"

"You asked me earlier, in the ballroom, if I would allow you my blood or if you would have to drink from another." Will answers as the hand on Hannibal's hip tightens into the fabric of the suit.

"Yet, I've already fed tonight. Only a few hours ago you lured me a meal right into this room." Hannibal can feel the prurient tension building between them.

"I know how you've been waiting for mine. Since the day you rescued me from Lee I know you've been craving it. He said it sang out to him, a tantalizing sweetness. Have you no thirst for it? Do you not hear the melody?" Will is just short of pleading, this rejection he feels building in his chest is physically aching.

Hannibal reassures with a single touch to Will's lips, quieting him for the moment as he leans in to press his lips to his ear. "Like an orchestral piece devised just for me."

Chills run down Will's spine at the warm breath against his neck, the vampire still running tepid from his recent feed. He tries to force himself to relax but the knowledge that Hannibal can likely hear the rabbit-like speed of his heart does nothing to console him. Their bodies press flush against each other, human arms wrapping around the vampire's middle to hold him close as his back is pressed into the glass.

He hears the long inhale and his hold grows tighter. "You are a beacon that calls to me in all senses, Will. A veritable feast for the entirety of my being." The wet trail of a tongue passes

over his neck to mark where fangs will meet flesh. "My imprint will declare to all that you are mine and mine alone."

"Yes, Hannibal. Only yours." Will whispers as he clutches to the Vampire.

He inhales sharply at the sting of teeth that sink into his neck. Warmth floods towards his neck and face, heating his cheeks. Something akin to euphoria rushes through his veins, pleasure rippling over him. His mind fills with blank white satisfaction that is quickly flooded with darkness by the beast he holds too tightly. Blackness surrounds him like the night air itself as the tendrils of the monster reach from the unseen space around to grip him.

He is entombed by the devil himself and he has no intention of finding a way out even if he wanted to.

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

So, a lot has been going on here and I didn't get a chance to write the actual chapter 😅...

However! I do have this drabble I wrote about Hannibal's point of view about the bite in Ch. 20. So have this! *throws it at you then hides in bushes*

Chapter Notes

All mistakes are my own!

Kudos nip at Will's skin 🧛‍♂️
Comments hold Will tightly👨❤️💋👨

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal steps towards the window to stand next to his companion. There is a warmth emanating from the dawn rising to meet them soon, a warning to his senses of the incoming sunlight. Something else seems to radiate from the human next to him with equal intensity. Will may be the empath, but his turmoil of emotions are on his sleeve. He wants Hannibal to understand, to help him push away these doubts he has.

It's a delicious release of power that he wishes Will could enjoy more, giving himself over to what he feels and desires without pesky morals restricting the beautiful beast he's beaten back with a bloody club. He'd see it freed, set loose upon the unworthy and pesky creatures who have poisoned his mind with such trivial rules. Societal niceties would crumble at their hands, blood would cascade across the streets and drown the moral do-gooder.

These thoughts have become far more frequent in Hannibal's mind of late, the human occupies almost all spaces in his mind palace anymore. A decorative prop in the hall, a picture on a wall, an echo behind a door, his presence is inescapable both inside and out of his subconscious. But that is certainly not a complaint. His design is coming to fruition beautifully.

Their banter pulls them together once more, a reassuring hand on Will's jaw to help ground him. Voices soften as Will unconsciously relaxes into the hold, a soft caress feeding into that starvation of affection he tries so hard to hide. It's a simple move to cement his position, to remind Will of their relationship that has blossomed so wondrously.

Remorseless eyes pit him where he stands as Will makes his demand, the one that he has been fighting himself over time and again. "Drink from me."

Were Hannibal human, he could have cried from the sheer emotion that rocks him from the humans words. The trust and determination in his eyes, the surety in his touch. It tightens his chest with something he has no recollection of feeling before, thousands of years have lent him no true joy like those words.

Of course, he can't just give the bear his treat without poking it a bit first.

The reflective tone he uses breaks down that determination so fast, anyone else would be left reeling. It shifts into desperation, a longing he never knew he needed to see so badly from Will, it's almost more delicious than the unwavering beast. He is still fixed on getting his way, and Hannibal could never begrudge him that, especially when their wants align so beautifully.

A genital caress of the soft pout of his lips holds him quiet as Hannibal leans towards his ear, his words dripping with milk and honey as he reassures the human. There is no intelligible string of words in any one language that can adequately describe the pull Will has over him. The pitter-patter of his heart echoes through Hannibal's brain like a Timpani rapidly careening towards the crescendo.

He takes a taste of the warm flesh he intends to sink sharp fangs into, a swish of his tongue against salty skin. It's warm with a fevered sweetness, uniquely Will. Something stirs softly within his lower gut, an anticipation and excitement for a true feast direct from the source.

Those worshipful words of devotion drive him to bite.

The burst of flavor washes over his senses like an electric shock, zapping across his tongue and down his throat. It arouses something from deep within him, awakening a need he's never known. Fire roars through his veins like a venomous stream as his grip tightens.

What is this reaction? Millenia of faceless victims and not once has his body burned with such ferocity as it filled with the warm liquid beating through human veins. Hands tighten against his clothing, pushing into his over sensitized skin before falling limp.

Any lesser of his kind would be unable to pull themselves from the thrall of this sensation, even Hannibal has to physically force his face from Will for a moment to collect himself. The human is boneless in his hold, loss of blood has rendered him unconscious for the time being.

With careful movements, he takes Will into a bridal hold and carries him into the bedroom, laying him gently across the sheets. As he removes his clothing, his mind analyzes what just occurred. He had planned for indulgence, expected it honestly after getting a taste back at Will's home. A loss of control of this magnitude is entirely deplorable. Why this human? Why this time period? What causes such a reaction in his blood? Is Hannibal the only one to react this way, or is this part of the apparent lure the man seems to possess.

After undressing him to a comfortable state of boxers and an undershirt, and cleaning and bandaging his wound, he positions him below the sheets. His eyes linger over the peaceful

face of the man laying in the dark sheets, a fine contrast to the drained pallor of his skin. A gentle knuckle brushes across his cheek before the older man leaves the room, going to the mini fridge and pulling out the forgotten blood bag, pleased to see his request was granted and he received Williams blood type. He occupies himself with preparing a water bath to warm the liquid before transfusion.

It doesn't take long to prepare the IV set up, a practiced motion from his multiple stints as a doctor throughout his lifespan. He removes a picture from the wall over the bed, using the nail there to hang the blood bag.

Another glance at the man's face shows no changes, a hand on his forehead reveals a slight fever. He leans forward and inhales near his neck, along with the smell of his blood is a strong smell of illness.

He laments not having as much control over the man's diet as he rolls up one of his shirt sleeves. It's far easier to dose him when he's on a steady feeding schedule. Using his own sharp teeth, he bites into the meat of his palm, iron flavor flooding his mouth. He gently coaxes Will's mouth open with his uninjured hand and clenches his fist to force a flow of his enhanced blood. Nimble fingers massage Will's throat to encourage swallowing, the human easily taking what is offered.

He feeds him enough to ward off the infection, a constant battle with the human's brain. The fever soon recedes, Will sleeping peacefully with Hannibal watching over him in the recliner.

Chapter End Notes

I've gotten a lot of questions about the encephalitis. This is why it hasn't been an issue yet :/

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

He's not dead! Hannibal wouldn't do that 👀👀👀👀 what are you talking about lolol.

Tw for self harm, but it's not any of the main characters. Also excessive gore resulting from the harm. I'll mark the section with '&' before and after and put a summary at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes quietly for the first time in a very long time. No nightmares, no injuries, no crushing weight of the falling earth resting on his shoulders. Today he wakes slowly and easily, stretching his legs under the soft sheets of the hotel bed and his arms over his head. He momentarily debates just staying in the comfort of the warm duvet, taking the time to enjoy the small victory, but is woken by the crunch of a paper as he brings his arms back down to his sides.

He glances over to the empty side next to him, the duvet made up properly other than where he has yanked it out of place with his shifting around. Upon the pillow is a note folded with crisp lines to stand on its own, the sophisticated script familiar to him even in the low glow of light from around the closed curtains covering the large windows. He gently rolls to his side and grabs the slip before sitting up, turning on the side table lamp and unfolding the note.

“No rest for the wicked,

No peace for the good.”

~ James S.A. Corey

Today I find myself occupied with business meetings and will

not be able to reconvene with you until these matters are

attended to. I’ve received word that food services have been

made available for you in the lobby should you wake before my

return. Please ensure you eat something high in protein,

it will help you feel much better after last night.

~H.L.

The note was unexpected but no less entertaining for it. The elegant font along with the ostentatious yet fitting quote earning a snort of amusement from the human. He carefully smooths out the crinkle he put into the paper from his early stretch before folding it again and setting it to his bedside. A glance at the clock informed him that he somehow managed to sleep through most of the day.

Will can feel the heat in his cheeks as he remembers the previous night. That kiss started something Will never could have predicted. It's like a wall in his mind tumbled into rubble to make space for Hannibal to step through. And step through he did. His presence has made itself home in the most intimate parts of his brain, melting into his being and coating him in a viscous wash of red. He casts a careful caress over the wounded skin on his neck only to find a bandage taped there, most likely Hannibal's doing.

With a reluctant yawn, he decides to get up, rolling out of the bed with enough grace not to fall face first. He debates taking a shower, but his stomach decides that food should come first. His body needs the proper fuel to rebuild the lost blood supply. Doctors orders.

Again, his face flushes warm pink at the thought.

When he gets over to his clothes, he realizes he's no longer going to be dressed up like he was the previous night. Cinderella returning to rags after the ball. The idea doesn't concern him, he's dressed in the same style for years. Yet, for some reason, he feels like what happened should have transformed him in a way. The easy way in which he has accepted this part of his life, of *Hannibal's* life, feels so underwhelming.

Once dressed in a simple neutral button-up and slacks, he removes the bandage to see the mark no longer bleeding and even beginning to scar which likely has something to do with Hannibal’s intervention. He grabs his things and makes his way out of the room. The hallway is quiet, though there are very few rooms on this floor, the size of the spaces much larger than a typical room. Not to mention anyone of any importance is likely caught in meetings much like Hannibal is.

The elevator is empty when he steps on, though in his trip to the lobby he does pick up a couple more passengers. He keeps his eyes either in front of himself or on his hands, the situation giving him slight anxiety since, unlike vampires, he can't tell who is human and who just happens to have a very well-tailored person suit. This is the first time he has really explored the hotel either not by Hannibal's side or in a fit of anger, though he would wager the second one wasn't without some form of supervision he was simply too upset to comprehend at the time.

They all exit at the lobby, a man holding open the door for Will to let him pass first. As he passes he hears a quiet but sharp inhale that sends a resounding shudder down his spine. In an effort to get away to a more crowded area he picks up his pace, glad to see the meal is still in full swing. It's starting to look more and more like an actual convention, people (in far more comfortable and casual clothes) sit scattered at the tables in the restaurant area. Light-hearted

chatter fills the space, the afternoon sun slowly filtering in through slotted curtains, likely an attempt made to mitigate damages to the 'other' guests without seeming completely closed off to their usual patrons.

He wants to let out a deep breath at finally being in an area where he is far less likely to be attacked, but he can still feel the eyes on his back. They burn through his shirt and into the seams of his skin and flesh, crawling over him like a roach. Refusing to turn and acknowledge the man, he approaches the table lined with food, a buffet-style for easy come and go from the guests. He finds that, unlike most buffets, the food is still very warm and well taken care of, the venue obviously putting in more of an effort to treat their human guests with high regard.

His heart skips a beat when he hears another quiet inhale from behind him, freezing him in his spot. Warm acrid breath ghosts over his ear and neck on the opposite side of his bite wound from the previous night, his mind screaming for him to move as his body remains frozen. The room around them has gone silent except for his breathing, and if not for a quick scan of the nearby tables with his eyes, he would think the deathly silence entirely in his head.

"Pure ambrosia." The vampire whispers, apparently so intoxicated by Will that he has yet to realize the deathly quiet surrounding them.

A cold hand settles on his arm, holding him in place and making him flinch at the tight grip. There is a quiet gasp somewhere in the corner, he can hear a couple of chairs scraping quietly on the floor. Emotions flutter through his mind too quickly to pick one to focus on, anger and fear at the attack, resignation and acceptance of his possible bite and or death, longing for it to be Hannibal instead that sniffles at his neck.

A chilled nose sucks in air so close to Hannibal's bite he can feel the intake of oxygen and what must be his scent that has the man so utterly captivated. The touch suddenly leaves him like it's been coated in flame. Will finally turns to look at his would-be attacker, his mind finally settling on anger. But he doesn't see an angered vampire ready to throw down, no blood-red eyes or flashes of fang in sight. Instead, before him a man kneels, his face almost to the floor.

Will can hear the whimpering apologies flooding from his mouth, barely loud enough to be heard over the small group that has formed around them. Viewers look on in shock at the taboo the vampire has committed, especially against someone seeming to belong to a man of such power.

&

The dismay he feels seems to match that of the crowd when he sees the twinkle of a blade in the hand of a woman now standing near the perpetrator. "You know what you must do, Lenard."

All thought process seems to stop as he watches the man slowly lifts his head from the floor. Tears streak down his face as he repeats his mantra of apologies. "I've touched what I have no right to. Please forgive me." He continues over and over as he takes the blade.

Will wants to yell for him to stop, to tell him that (as much as he wants to see him pay for acting that way) nobody has to die. However, the words die instead in his throat when the man begins sawing at the junction between the hand that was placed upon him and the wrist. Quick jerky movements back and forth with the dull blade ensure this will not be fast. He intends to drag it out, inflict pain, and suffer his penance as he harshly removes the appendage.

Warm sticky blood begins to splatter and pour out from the motion, spilling onto the patterned carpet. The man quickly shuffling back when he realizes this. "Mustn't stain you any more than I already have." He mutters, not allowing any cries of pain. The only sounds out of his mouth are continued apologies. "I'm so sorry. I touched what I should not have. Forgive me, please."

"Will?"

He turns at the confused voice, appreciation washing over him at the familiar face. "Benji."

The boy carefully approaches, stopping just behind where Will is standing, facing the man still sawing away. Will cringes when he realizes the guy is only just past halfway, though it's difficult to tell with all of the blood. Benji stops to listen to the man for a moment before turning to Will with wide eyes. "He touched you?"

"He thought I was a… a feeder." He hates to use the word, but any others that could adequately describe the situation escapes him completely.

Benji nods slowly before he notices one of the two marks peeking out from under his shirt collar. His tone grows cold as he begins to explain, though there is obvious displeasure in his mention of Hannibal. "This is the reaction to your relationship with Dr. Lecter garners. This man is not worthy to touch something belonging to Lecter, he's had no excuse for not knowing considering you've been marked." He gestures towards his own neck in an explanation where his own wounds are on display. "He must remove the part he sullied you with and offer it as recompense for his crime."

After a few final cuts, the limb drops down into the pool that has built below them, the carpet unable to absorb any more liquid to the point that it now sits on top in a puddle. How he's even still conscious is totally beyond any sort of logic applicable to humans. The knife drops down into the blood next to the hand, Lenard huffing deep breaths at having finally completed his work. Will can't help but shudder when he uses his remaining hand to lift the severed one towards him in offering.

Will hesitates, not sure what to do. Thank any existing gods that Benji is here with him, a familiar face to direct him even in his displeasure. “If you accept the offering, you accept the apology. If not, then this case must be taken to Dr. Lecter directly to dole out the punishment he deems appropriate. But, because he's not here to make the appropriate decision it falls to you.”

Just the idea of what Hannibal would do to the poor man already bleeding out before him has Will reaching forward for the hand. He stalls when he feels the familiar human grab his arm, holding out a small black styrofoam take out box he must have been planning to use at the

buffet. Will takes it in thanks, but the look of disgust on the vampires' face, 'Lenard' the woman with the knife had identified him, is scarcely hidden. Though he's already committed enough travesties today, he wouldn't dare say anything to Will as he places the severed limb into the box.

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Will quickly clips it closed, giving the man a nod before shifting his gaze to Benji. From his peripheral, he can see a couple of others helping the man to his feet before dragging him away, the body almost limp in their grasp like a rag doll. The crowd quickly disperses now that the action is over, floating back into their mundane happenings like there wasn't a man sawing off his hand with a pocket knife only moments before.

The blonde next to him seems to stare at the wound on his neck for a few seconds before meeting Will's gaze. "I told you, he's dangerous Will. That happened because that vampire touched someone *associated* with Dr. Lecter, just the thought of potentially angering him had a man severing his hand from his body."

There is a seriousness in those eyes that gives Will pause. His stone-faced anger is a completely different facet of the boy than what he saw the previous night, cold and distant like an ice storm has blown over the bubbly young man from before. "Thank you for your help." Will attempts. He honestly doesn't know how else to respond in this situation, sarcasm being his usual defense mechanism. "Does something like that happen a lot? You seem to have a good grasp on what I needed to do in that situation."

"In most cases, the offending vampire will offer something of value as an apology. Perhaps a gold watch or even cut off their ponytail depending on the status of the one you belong to. I've *never* seen one cut off a limb."

Will's eyes jump down to the heavy weight of the take away box in his hand, the smell of blood still a heady curtain in the air around them. There are already staff members attempting to cordon the area to keep people from tracking blood through the hotel. A few people still eye him wearily though most have returned to their own business now that the entertainment is over.

"You should take it to him." The boy's voice brings him back to the conversation. "You accepted the apology, so now you need to let Dr. Lecter know what happened."

Will can only give a nod as he breathes out slowly in an attempt to ground himself. "This is really not how I pictured my stay here going."

There is a small tilt of Benji's head, like a curious animal, as his brows furrow. "What do you mean? What else has happened?"

Will wants to snort and ask 'what hasn't?' but is able to rein himself in enough not to smirk and instead keeps serious. "Some issues with one of our neighbors. I'm sure you can imagine how that conversation went."

Furrowed brows shot up into golden hair. “I thought I heard someone talking about the disposal team working on the top floor. You need to take that to him before he finds out from someone else, I sure as hell don’t wanna be on the other end of *that* conversation.” He gestures to the box before directing Will towards the elevators.

Chapter End Notes

The vampire who grabbed Will sawed off the hand he used to touched him with a pocket knife. He then gives it to Will as an apology for 'dirtying him'.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Time to confront Hani!

Kudos wash Will in his horrible after shave to remove the smell,
Comments make Hannibal scent mark Will to replace it himself 👀

All mistakes are my own!

Hannibal is seated listening to the droning of the meeting, mundane conversations that have no potential of reaching a reasonable solution. Egos and conflicting personalities ensure that the only conclusion to be found is that he disdains these meetings even more than he had in the past.

He doesn't honestly pay attention to most of what's going on, shouting matches breaking out throughout the room. He could stop them with nothing more than a look at the head of the committee and the room would fall back under control, but he doesn't wish to take a position of power he gave up for a reason. He left the council centuries ago for the sake of his own sanity, the state of the room veritably enforcing that decision.

Just as his mind begins to wander to a certain human, one of the hotel staff discreetly enters the room and approaches him. Hannibal had chosen to remain towards the back of the meeting Hall which inevitably seems to serve a purpose other than not being at the forefront of the attention of those within. The staff member does not make a fuss nor bring attention to himself, the speaker completely ignoring him and continuing on with his speech which is being mostly overturned by others yelling over him.

Speaking low in an attempt not to be overheard, he leans close to Hannibal to share news. Even with the enhanced vampire hearing, Hannibal knows nobody would dare listen in to the private conversation between the staff member and himself, how few actually are paying attention to the staff member, for fear of their immortal lives.

There is a sudden silence that spreads through the room, however, when he hears the news. A feeling akin to pure enmity bursts through the room and fills the air. It only lasts but a millisecond, but it's enough for every last person in the room to understand something has happened. It takes a lot to make the magnanimous man show a shift of power so explosively. It leaves a sour taste in the back of their throats.

All eyes watch as he stands, straightening his jacket before excusing himself, the picture of composure, as if the lingering uncongenial fear from the other vampires isn't stifling the air as they stand there waiting. All eyes follow as he leaves the room.

*****

Will stares down at the box, his eyes burning holes into the styrofoam as if the smoke signals will give him answers. He has been walking for a moment, absently floating through the hotel. He's honestly not entirely sure where the meeting his compatriot is in is taking place, but the consistent movement of his feet allow the gears in his mind to analyze the first scene he's witnessed in easily a week, almost two.

It's odd to realize how much has happened in so short of a time. Just over a week ago the world was normal, his friends were human, and he was in a routine that was as familiar as an old bike. Now; the US is on the verge of collapse, his closest companion and psychiatrist is a centuries old vampire, and apparently he is blood sucker catnip.

The vampire, Lenard, was obviously a nobody. If he was of any importance he would have been in a meeting like the others, but he was wandering the floors. He seemed to confuse Will as something edible like the feeders, but that didn't sit right with him. He never saw any traveling about the floors during the day, he only saw them at the gala.

Could that mean he knew he was a companion? He seems like the licentious type that would just sink his teeth into whoever and give them a ring or something to keep them quiet. The kind who would stalk alleyways and feed whenever he likes. Obviously those habits have kept up here as well, though he seemed relatively well known since someone referred to him by name. So his behavior must be pretty well known by other human companions. Do they allow it? Let him feed on whoever?

They only seemed reserved when they realized who he was, who he was with. Benji's presence there was a God send for sure, but something still irks him about the way he acted. Since revealing his connection to Hannibal the bubbly boy has been cold. He's been warning Will consistently that the vampire is dangerous, that he's different. Will can vouch for both of those things, but he still feels like there's something he's missing.

He stops with a sigh, forcing himself to take a deep breath. His feet planted in the center of a long empty hall. Will looks up and around to realize, like he'd predicted, he has no clue where he is. Boring walls with mediocre paintings and fake plants that line them stretch on for a while forward and back. Doors scattered in between ostentatious decorations.

He could easily retrace his steps to go back, but just as he resolves to do so the door to his right opens. His entire body tenses as a bout of dread drops to his gut. He quickly pulls his shoulders from his ears, though, when he sees a familiar face emerging from the room.

The vampire seems equally surprised about Will's presence as Will does his. What are the odds he happened to stop just in front of the room he would emerge from? The box feels heavy in his hand and the realization of what has happened settles heavily again. The foreboding of having to tell him is not a pleasant feeling.

Hannibal's entire demeanor seems to relax when he sees Will, micro expressions of fear and anger slip away as soon as maroon eyes meet blue. Tension that would be invisible to others, visibly leaves his shoulders. He says Will's name with palpable relief as he closes the door.

"Will. I'm glad to see you're up." His eyes scan over Will to check him for any issues that may have arisen.

"Hannibal…" Will speaks, not sure where to start.

The vampire's gaze lands on the black box, his nose twitching as he takes a discreet inhale which causes his face to scrunch minutely in distaste. "Had I known that is what the kitchen would offer you, I'd have made you breakfast myself."

Will can't help but huff at the humor. "So you're aware?"

"I was told another made contact with you. Any other details were left out." He answers honestly.

The human offers a small sigh and pinches the bridge of his nose as he holds out the container. His eyes are closed but it doesn't take much to imagine the reaction on his face as he hears the slide of the lid open. "He… Mistook me as someone he could feed from, but his realization was grave. So, he sawed off the hand he touched me with."

When Will opened his eyes, he couldn't miss the glint in the other man's gaze. The reason behind it was mostly hidden, though from what he knew of the man it was satisfaction of the reaction and simultaneous anger at the action having happened at all. He closes the box carefully and hands it back, earning a sardonic look.

"It was given as penance, an apology for his actions. A gift. One I hope he can learn from." There's no pity in his voice, only a righteous resolve that Will feels is only the beginning.

Will glances down at the box then back at Hannibal. "So, is there protocol for what I should do now?"

"It was given to you, so you do what you feel is necessary. What do you want to do with it?"

Will narrows his eyes in displeasure. "I don't want to hold it anymore." His delivery is deadpan.

More amusement flashes over Hannibal's face as he holds out his hand. Will easily hands it back. Without missing a beat the vampire walks to the nearest trash can and unceremoniously drops it in. He pulls his pocket square to use to wipe off his hands and tosses that as well as he rejoins Will, a smirk on his face as well.

"Have you actually eaten?" He asks, smoothly shifting with the lightened mood of the conversation.

Will shakes his head. "My attempt was… Interrupted."

This earns a nod as Hannibal places a hand on the small of his back to lead him towards the lobby once more. "How are you feeling?"

Will unconsciously leans into the still warm body next to him as they walk. "I feel fine, a little sluggish but that is common before I get caffeine."

"Even deprived of caffeine? And they call us the monsters." Hannibal responds with a grin that shows his teeth. He steps close and takes a small inhale, obviously unhappy with what he finds.

"Still smell like him?" Will asks, genuinely intrigued.

"Indeed." Hannibal sighs, Will can see the restraint he seems to be using not to touch him more in an attempt to cover the scent with his own.

"Worse than the aftershave?" Will teases lightheartedly.

Hannibal gives him a sideways glance with a small smirk. "I'd rather bathe you in that."

Will can't help but join him in the shared humor as they emerge from the hallway into the lobby. The crowd has thinned significantly from when he was in here before. Only a few people scattered at tables. The area where the vampire committed his deed is now roped off, covered by floor to ceiling tarps to hide the red mess soaked into the floor.

He follows dutifully as Hannibal leads them to a table further towards the back. He can practically feel the slimy gaze of the others in the room glued to him as he walks. He's half tempted to press further into Hannibal in an attempt to remove himself from their line of sight but resigns quickly to the fact that he'll likely never not have all eyes on him again. Not after a man cuts off his hand for him.

Not after being with Hannibal.

He finds some relief when they sit down in a booth, his back to most of the people so he can't see them and they likewise have no view of him. All he can see is the wall and the man sitting in front of it. He feels his foot lightly bump into Hannibal's below the table and it helps to ground him. Will looks up from the fine wood of the table and their eyes meet.

Blue locks onto a rust-brown. The tension in his shoulders bleed out and he's left feeling loose like the bones have been yanked from his body. "Perhaps I am more exhausted than I thought." He sighs as he rubs his eyes under his glasses.

"I figured you would be. A good meal will help. Though I am lack to prepare it myself at the moment." He acquiesces, his voice softening.

Will watches his face for a moment. "You prefer to provide don't you? It's not just a hobby. You don't eat out, you always make your own food, for you or others."

Hannibal hesitates as he seems to think over his next words. "I prefer to know what goes into what I'm eating, and that extends to those that I care for."

"Particularly humans who could keel over because of a bad piece of meat." Will earns a smirk. "If you want it done right, do it yourself."

"I am a firm believer in that philosophy." He confirms as he folds his hands on the table.

"You're picky." Will accuses playfully.

There's a slight crinkle of amusement in the vampire's eyes. "I'm particular."

"You're a perfectionist." Will continues. "You've already experienced the worst at the hands of others, so when in your hands you chose only the best for Hannibal Lecter."

Before there's a chance to respond, the waiter comes over. Hannibal handles the entire exchange with grace, ordering Will a glass of orange juice and a hearty lunch. The waiter doesn't dare acknowledge the human, obviously versed in the ways of their esteemed guests.

That means the waiter is one of them, the rules only applying to others of their kind as he found out from Benji. It makes him wonder briefly just how many are scattered through society. The bus driver downtown, a school teacher, your neighbor…

Your psychiatrist.

The waiter leaves with the order, Will having blanked out for most of the conversation since he wasn't a part of it anyways. "I would prefer the term meticulous." The elder vampire adds in after the server is gone.

"I'm sure you'll insist on a full course meal when we get back to Baltimore."

"I would enjoy that. Perhaps invite Alana as well." The unspoken second party was not unnoticed.

"Have you heard from her?" Will questions, sincerity lowering his voice.

"She reached out to me a few hours ago. They are doing fine, though you are severely missed by the FBI."

Will's face pales. "Jack." He scrubs his face with his hands. "He's probably been trying to contact me."

"He has attempted my number a select few times, though each time I made him aware that I was out of the area." The waiter quickly sets down two glasses of water and one of orange juice before absconding.

Will meets his eyes again and can still see the amusement there. "And you didn't tell him I was with you?"

A small shrug. "It never came up."

"So he probably is assuming I'm dead." Will sighs.

"Unless Alana made him aware. Do you wish to contact him?" He seems intrigued by the possibility.

"What good would it do? There's nothing I can do from Seattle. Other than listen to him vent his frustrations." His words seem defeated in their honesty.

"They are likely working alongside other response teams in an effort to control the spread," Hannibal suggests.

"What would they even be able to do? Barricades in and out of the city? There's no way of testing for it, is there? Maybe a temperature check, but if they recently fed then it's not gonna matter." Will pauses for a moment. "Have they even figured out they aren't even humans anymore?"

"Those are all questions that will be discussed at the next meeting I'm meant to attend. Would you like to accompany me?" Hannibal asks as he checks his watch.

Will's eyes widen, "Is that allowed?" He asks.

"It's not unheard of." He assures. "Though I've nary had company I deemed worthy of bringing along."

"You've made a lot of those kinds of exceptions for me."

"You are a worthy exception." The vampire responds with fondness in his voice.

The waiter chooses then to return with the food for Will. He sets the plate down with a nod to Hannibal before leaving once more. He seems totally content to watch Will and their surroundings as the human eats, not having ordered anything for himself.

It's a mostly silent exchange, occasional check-ins from the waiter and observations made by either man. Will eats quickly, but not enough to be rude when he realizes how hungry he actually is. Perhaps having a meal plan set up for afterward would be better the next time.

Next time? Would there be one?

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Hello! I hope you enjoy the new chapter!

Kudos place a reassuring hand on Will's thigh.

Comments pull him close to press a kiss to his head.

They enter the hall mostly unnoticed, Hannibal leading them in like he owns the place. This room is set more for an assembly than the generalized meeting that the previous room had been arranged in. Members of the council already sat at the raised stage at the front of the room. Will follows Hannibal into the room, taking place in a section of chairs that is near the stage but not far enough forward to be at the forefront of attention. It's slightly off to the side near the wall. Hannibal pulls out a chair for Will so he can sit before taking his own seat next to him.

"What should I be expecting at this meeting?" Will asks as they walk down the hall towards the assembly hall.

"This particular gathering is for the council and the oldest of our kind. Somewhat of an unofficial extended council if you will. It's always good to draw from the experiences of those who have lived long lives." Hannibal explains.

Looking around the hall, there is a distinguished air to the people inside. Courteous professionalism, much like you would find in older aristocrats that you see in movies. Will tries not to stare too obviously, but many of the people within the room look so esteemed, it's amazing to think they would blend in with human society and not look like an ostentatious asshole.

After a few more people enter, there is a clearing of a throat and the room falls silent. On stage, the last of the council members have arrived and are now seated in a semi-circle facing the crowd. There is a moment of silence as they seat themselves and prepare for what appears to be a Q and A of sorts.

Bedelia takes a small deep breath before looking out over the crowd. “Thank you to all in attendance. We have much to discuss.”

Will can see a figure from the corner of his eye stand from his seat, a burly man who looks like he belongs in a silent film, his mustache comical. “Madame Councilor, what steps do we have in place to prevent humans from becoming aware of our spread?”

Her expression is stony, likely mentally preparing for the onslaught of questions and concerns she is about to receive. “We have control over all major news media in the US in one way or another, there is no story that could make it on air without us being aware. We are fully capable-”

Her words are rolled over by another woman who is obviously unaware of how to use her inside voice. Her shrill tone startles Will slightly, a large familiar hand appearing on his thigh helping to ground him for the time being. “Almost half of the continental US has been engulfed in this contagion!” She spits the last word like vitriol.

Will can feel the tension building in the room, but most of all he can taste the displeasure Hannibal is feeling in the back of his throat. The minute twitch of his hold on Will’s leg and the slightest narrowing of his gaze all the tell he needs. He rests his hand on top of the vampire’s, giving a small squeeze in hopes of returning that reassuring presence.

Bedelia doesn’t let the emotions she feels show on her face, but Will can tell she’s tired. She has obviously been running around like crazy to get information to find a solution. “We have begun working with major policing forces such as the FBI to contain the newbloods-”

Another man further towards the front stands far too quickly, his chair almost tipping behind him. “How do we plan to handle this new spike in our population? There are far too many now to realistically sweep them into the confines of our society!” He is very expressive, arms swinging around in front of him like one of those inflatables you see at car dealerships.

Will is surprised to finally hear a response from someone on stage who isn’t Bedelia. Mason’s annoyingly nasally tenor echoing over the room. He and the lady from before have a lack of inside voice in common. “Verger Farms have expanded our collection of feeders drastically in the last decade! With the continued increase in our livestock population, we can maintain healthy feeding habits!”

Will can feel the twitch in Hannibal’s grip once more, his eyes jumping towards Hannibal who is leaning forward in his seat slightly. He is very obviously thinking, metaphorical gears turning as he makes a connection. Will mostly ignores the comments happening around them at the crazy man’s proclamation in favor of focusing on his companion. Will turns in his chair to face him, leaning in conspiratorially. “Penny for your thoughts?”

Hannibal leans in closer, their shoulders pressing together. “Lee mentioned in one instance during our… conversations,” Will gives him a side-eyed glance but doesn’t call him on the obvious dodge “that he was given the suggestion by another. Someone in a position of power pushed a reluctant half-baked plan to attempt to turn as many people as possible and build up a following.”

“It wasn’t his idea?” Will has to force himself to keep his voice down. “Mason was rather determined to see Lee when he came over that time.”

Hannibal frowns. “He had the idea, but not the motivation. After getting support from someone else, however, he decided to try. Who can you think of that has a modicum of authority over our kind that would support a hostile take over of the humans?”

Will's gaze slides back to Mason to watch as he explains something about his feeders to the crowd. "Someone who has something to gain by a limited amount of humans?"

Their eyes meet as Hannibal stands, the room immediately falling silent save for Mason's continued gloating. It takes a second for Mason to realize no one is listening and turns towards Hannibal. There is a look of challenge in his eyes like he expects nothing can ruin this facade of victory he's made for himself.

"Councilor Verger, as you and the rest of the council are aware, I have the man responsible for the start of this wave in custody," Hannibal confirms.

Mason looks like a shark with the grin that plasters across his face. "Yes, you have made your reluctance to hand him over to proper authorities quite well known."

Hannibal shows no reaction to his words, his mask fitted perfectly. "After multiple sessions with him, he has informed me that he was working with another." There are quiet gasps at this revelation.

Will can see the twitch in Mason's eye at this news, Bedelia straightening in her seat. "Please continue Dr. Lecter." She encourages.

"His original idea was to create a group of followers, his own coven of new bloods to follow him as he attempted to work his way up within our ranks. Take territory and the like. He knew that the success of such a plan was slim, but after receiving support from, and I quote, 'Someone with authority', he moved forward with his plan. He was encouraged by this subsidizer to expand his plans, encourage a new generation to take over." Hannibal is not subtle at all with the way his icy gaze is locked on Mason. The man has quickly fallen from the pedestal he set himself on and crumbled on the floor.

Bedelia could see the direct sight of the old blood to her fellow council member. By the silent anticipation of the others in the room, they could likely see it as well. "Has he said who?"

"He hadn't the chance. After Mr. Verger came to do his own investigation of the prisoner, a guard found his tongue violently cut from his head." His eyes narrow slightly as his voice lowers. "Immediately after. It's a shock he didn't die choking on his own blood."

Mason immediately rises to the accusation. "And how do you know the guard didn't do it and say he found him that way?"

Bedelia also adds her own thought, her voice low. "This is a heavy allegation, Hannibal."

"One that I would not make if I was not confident in my suspicions." He states plainly.

Bedelia turns towards Mason, eyeing him carefully. "What do you have to say to this?"

"I do not see any reason to take these allegations with any grain of salt, not to mention that my sister went missing when left in his care. This is obviously an attack on my person!" He counters, a bit of whispering starting up in various areas of the room.

“Missing?” A female voice asks from the back of the room. Will, as well as the majority of the room, turn around to find the source of the voice. Standing in the walkway stretched down the middle of the room, is Margot Verger in all of her glory. “You abandoned me. Dr. Lecter was kind enough to take me under his care.”

Will could see Mason’s mouth opening and closing like a suffocating fish as Bedelia stands. “Ms. Verger, is there anyone else who can corroborate your story? I’m becoming rather fed up with allegations being thrown left and right.”

“Yes, Hannibal’s claimed human was there that night as well as my own.” She answers calmly, her arms casually crossed over her chest.

“Is she with you?” Hannibal asks as he holds a hand to Will in offering for him to stand. Will allows Hannibal to pull him to his feet, being pulled in close to the larger man.

Margot nods, relaxing at Hannibal’s voice. “She is in my hotel room.”

Hannibal turns to Bedelia with a sigh, though his face is serious. “I request a private audience with those accused as well as the witnesses.”

Her face seems to melt in exhaustion as she nods. “I agree. Margot, fetch your claimed human, please. We will be going into a recess until further notice.” At her words, the rest of the council stands, gathering their things. Mason leaves with them, though he seems far more reluctant until another member fetches him. Sound picks up once more, a mixture of complaints and general conversation as they leave the stage. Hannibal and Will approach Margot, Hannibal taking her hand to place a kiss on the back.

“Wonderful to see you again. How was your trip?” He asks cordially.

She offers him a small smile and a nod. “It was fine. Alana is far less fond of planes, as I have found. She slept through the entire flight.”

“So you two have been getting along well then? Why did you bring her?” Will asks, skeptical about the sudden appearance of the younger Verger.

“As the younger sibling of a council member, it would be… unsavory of me not to make a small appearance. Alana wanted to stay home with your pack but I insisted she join me. If the world is as screwed as I think it is, it’s best she learn our ways quickly.” They begin walking out of the auditorium together, stopping just outside the door.

“My pack?” Will felt a ball of dread fall into his lower stomach. With all of the stress and anxieties of the last two weeks, he had almost totally forgotten them. What a horrible dog father he is.

“Hannibal asked we care for them while you were staying with him. A small price to pay for free board and his protection from my brother.” She offers a small smirk like she knows what he was just thinking.

That ball of dread lightens a bit as he takes a deep breath. He knows Alana will take good care of them. In all honesty, he doesn't see himself being able to retrieve them for the foreseeable future. "Good, thank you. We'll see you in there?" He offers the escape so that she can retrieve the psychologist.

"Yes. Excuse me." She quickly turns, easily making her way through the crowd that has gathered in front of the doors.

Hannibal gentle as ever, guides Will in the opposite direction, a hand on his back. "Thank you." He offers quietly.

The older vampire glances down at him. "As much as I appreciate the gratitude, I must admit the reason behind it escapes me." Their steps slow so that they can have a bit of a conversation before reaching the council chambers.

Will hesitates for a moment. "For taking care of me even when I can't. I didn't even think of what to do about the dogs, I was so focused on the craziness happening around me. You've more than cemented yourself in my good books." He offers a small but genuine smile, earning one in return.

The hand on his back travels up to tangle in his curls, pulling him in to place a soft kiss on his hairline. "You keep a solid chain wrapped in barbed wire around that particular book, I am honored to have made my place in it."

Will offers a small sigh as they step to a door with a guard standing before it. The woman acknowledges Hannibal's presence before opening the door to let them pass. A shiver of dread creeps down Will's spine as they pass the threshold.

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

> Thank you all for your continued patience! Oofta things are getting busy here. I wish you all a wonderful holiday season and I hope the last of 2020 treats you well. May 2021 get better ❤️❤️.
>
> For now, here is the trial. Lecter VS Verger!
>
> Kudos feed into Hannibal's story,
> Comments hold Will and Hannibal's hands ❤️

They enter the room with a small knock from Hannibal, the council seated in a semi-circle with the exception of Mason who is standing on the other side of the room. Will keeps his eyes down for the time being, playing the demure human tagging along with the powerful vampire (Though it's not entirely inaccurate).

"Hannibal, if you would make the proper introductions please?" Bedelia asks, seated regally in the center of the half circle just as she had on stage.

He offers a small nod, gesturing from Will to the council. "Valuable members of the council, I present William Graham. Will, this is the council. You've met Bedelia before."

Will nods and glances up at them, their eyes all focusing on him. "A pleasure." His words feel small, he tries to hold back the prickliness in his voice.

A few heads bob in acknowledgment. "Your stay with us has not been one of peace." Bedelia points out.

Will can't help the sardonic look he shoots her. "That's one way of putting it I suppose, though not of any fault of the council."

Heavy footsteps echo from the other side of the room coming over. "I think, personally, that this is absolutely ridiculous. This entire accusation should be thrown out, there's no merit behind it. It's empty threats." Mason chuckles, trying to play off the trap he's obviously being placed in.

"You are being accused of treason, Mason. This is very serious." One of the other members finally speaks before turning to them. "And Hannibal, the same solemnity must be expressed towards you. Your words have weight due to your prominence within our ranks, but I would advise you not throw this weight around carelessly."

Hannibal accepts this warning in stride, clearly not backing down, whereas Mason has already begun to bleed nervousness into the air. It's then that Margot enters, Alana following dutifully behind. She offers Will a small smile when she sees him, obviously doing far better. "Greetings, Ms. Verger. If you could make the proper introductions so that we may begin?"

"Of course. Valuable members of the council, I present Dr. Alana Bloom. Alana, this is the council. Madame Du Marier is at the head." Margot stands next to Alana, her hand carefully caressing the small of the human's back. A comforting gesture, intimate.

"Thank you for your hospitality." Alana greets with a nod.

"And you've met Hannibal as well as my brother Mason before." She speaks of her sibling with audible disdain.

Hannibal places a quick press of lips to her knuckles. "A pleasure to see you again."

"Now that introductions are in place, we are here to investigate the allegations against council member Mason Verger." Another voice from around the table speaks, his voice small but no less authoritative for it. "Councilman Verger, how do you plea to high treason?"

"Innocent, framed in fact." He responds with a wave of his hand as if the matter doesn't concern him.

The man nods and turns to Hannibal, his face serious. "Dr. Lecter. You mentioned a day when Councilman Verger came to you to interview the culprit of the mass infection, correct? Could you describe to the council the events of that night?"

Hannibal offers a small nod, his hand resting on Will's spine. He begins explaining Alana arriving at his home, the group settling into the living room, and the subsequent phonecall he receives. The story is exactly as it happened. Until Hannibal leaves with Mason.

Since Will wasn't with them, he can't say for sure how true his story of what happened actually is. The only reason he has to question what he says has nothing to do with Hannibal's flawless ability to charm the council into his story, but the tightening of Mason's jaw. From the moment Hannibal mentioned arriving to where he keeps Jackson Lee in captivity, he has looked additionally more angered by the story. There is obvious restraint being used not to burst out how his words are fallacy.

His already flighty eyes are jumping around the room and Will can tell he's not the only one to notice this reaction. One of the younger looking members seated towards the end of the table is keeping a keen eye on him. Though anyone with a modicum of observational skills could see how guilty he is making himself look.

Hannibal indeed continues to fabricate the story, telling Bedelia how he left Mason with the prisoner to return, not only to receive a report that Lee had been vandalized from one of the guards and the older Verger never returning for his sister. When Will looks over to Alana and Margot, he sees no outward reaction of surprise at Hannibal's contrived tale of woe. Obviously Margot must have said something to her about them putting him away and how badly it needs to happen. Even at the expense of the truth.

"Ms. Verger, Dr. Bloom, and Mr. Graham were all present for this?" One of them asks.

"When I took Councilman Verger to the facility it was strictly myself, Councilman Verger, and his driver. The driver remained in the car. Those moments within my home were witnessed by all three here." Hannibal responds with a serious calm.

"Mr. Verger? Is this true?" The same voice asks, attention shifting to the squirrelly blond.

If he had the proper blood flow, his face would be red in his frustration. "Absolutely not! After my visit with Mr. Lee, I returned to his house to find my sister and the doctor gone! I was greeted by Graham with a stake to my heart!" He looks like he wants to say more, but is stopped by a hand lifted by Bedelia.

"Dr. Bloom. I would like to hear about your experience during this. When Mr. Verger and his sister arrived at Hannibal's home, how would you describe his behavior?" She inquires with a hint of resignation in her voice.

Alana seems to think for a moment before speaking. "Immediately upon him entering the house he felt off to me. His demeanor was disrespectful towards Hannibal and he made comments about feeding from myself and Will knowing we were his guests. Hannibal once had to stop him from approaching us by physically moving into his way. After Hannibal was able to corral him out the door, Margot, Will, and myself remained at the house to await their return." She confirms, earning a nod from the blonde.

"Mr. Graham. I'm told you are employed by the FBI. Is this true?" He offers only a nod in response. "What do you make of this case?"

Will looks towards Mason, the man practically vibrating with the need to speak, attempt to save himself from the jaws of the trap. "Someone in the room is lying." He points out, Alana not as subtly tensing at his comment. "If I were in your position, I would believe the words of four witnesses over one."

The council woman's eyes narrow slightly in thought. "Thank you, Mr. Graham. Fellow members. Are we prepared to deliberate?"

"I believe the answer is quite clear and move to skip deliberation and go straight to the vote." The quiet one speaks as he relaxes back into his seat. Another makes a sound of agreement as the rest nod.

"Understood. We shall skip deliberation." Will swears he hears a quiet plea from Mason. "I will put it to a vote of the council. Those who believe Mason Verger is guilty as charged say aye."

Fair skin goes pale when the psychotic blonde hears the resounding voice of all of the present members. "W-what? I'm sorry, I don't think I heard that right." His anger is palpable, lacing a bad taste in the back of Will's throat.

There's a subtle twitch of fingers against his back, so small he may not have noticed if his entire body wasn't taught with tension from the outburst. "No Mason, I'm sorry. This council

deems you unfit for service within our ranks. You are officially removed from your position." Bedelia holds no remorse in her voice, her obvious derision coloring her speech.

Will watches aghast as Mason begins to march towards the table, wanting to act out in his anger. He is only a few steps from being within grabbing distance of one of the members before he all of a sudden drops to his knees, his breaths coming out in heavy pants. An injured noise escapes him, pitiful compared to the barrage of raged words he was spouting seconds ago.

The sight seems to also shock Alana who audibly gasps next to him, her hands immediately reaching for Margot. Everyone in the room is frozen in place save for Hannibal and Will, the aura soaking into the air across the room and pressed into the unruly man's back seems to have given everyone else pause as well.

"That is more than enough of that, Mason." The vampire scolds with weighted words.

The silence seems to carry from the council and the others alike, the only sound a pained wheezing from Mason. Bedelia seems to be the first of the table to snap out of the stupor of what they've just witnessed. She stands with grace, but Will can see the obvious nervousness in her movements. It's obvious she does not feel comfortable with Mason subdued, even if Hannibal's actions may have saved her.

"For the charges of attempted attack upon our ranks, revealing us to the humans, and high treason against our kind, you are found guilty. You shall be sentenced to death as deemed appropriate by the executioner." Her eyes lift back up to meet Hannibal's. "Mason Verger shall be held at the facility alongside Jackson Lee, his co-conspirator until such time. Do you object?"

"Not at all." He responds easily, his anger forced back behind the mask.

"Dr. Lecter, I formally release him into your custody until such time as he is to be executed." A couple of guards enter, immediately moving towards Mason to begin strapping him down. A muzzle on his face, his arms bound together from his hands to his biceps, they even inject him with something. "You may release your hold." She suggests, not orders, because she knows he wouldn't heed an order from her.

And just as quickly as the aura appeared, it's gone fast enough to give a normal person whiplash. One of the members clears their throat, sweat along the side of their brow from the sheer shock and nerves of what just transpired. "Dr. Lecter, that was truly incredible. I am in awe of you- I am grateful for your interference." He seems to swallow a lump in his throat before speaking again. "We are now a member short on this council. I formally extend this offer to you to rejoin our ranks once more."

Bedelia seems flustered for a moment before resigning to her fate. "You would be an invaluable addition into our ranks during these troublesome times. Your previous position on the council would be returned to you as well."

Will watches Hannibal closely during this exchange. He can see the ideas and plans quickly flitting through his mind as he comes to a decision, carefully calculating the pros and cons.

"Your offer is most appreciated, but I must decline. I stepped down centuries ago and have no intentions of returning under the current circumstances. And, as for your gratitude, think nothing of it. It was a necessary action to ensure the safety of our valuable members of the council." There's mischief in his eyes, a glint of hidden plans and thoughts of using this situation to his advantage already underway.

"That is regrettable, but we shall accept your decline. You four are free to leave. We will have Mason Verger transported to your facilities as soon as possible." The Councilman sighs, stressfully rubbing his temples.

"You may be excused." Bedelia dismisses them, Hannibal offering a nod in thanks before leading Will from the room. He can hear the voice of Margot speaking to the council as they leave, but he is focused more on the rough treatment of Mason as his practically limp body is moved by guards.

"You lied." Will whispers once they've returned to the hall.

Hannibal glances towards him with a small smile. "I may have tweaked the truth a bit, but I was not incorrect that Mason was the betrayer."

"Just had to make the council understand. Why did they seem so shocked when you subdued Mason? Did they not know you were capable?" Will's eyes track from the vampire's chest to his face to settle on his nose.

A small smile graces his lips in amusement. "While you have seen me use it quite often in the last few weeks, this is not normal behavior for me. Bedelia was aware, but in all the time we have been acquainted she has witnessed it only once before now. The rest of the council, I would gather, were not aware based on their reaction."

The human's eyes narrow slightly. "You enjoyed exhibiting that power in front of them. One of the most powerful groups of vampires and you got to prove you are stronger than them without even lifting a finger. A power play. But why? Bedelia practically bends to your whim already."

Will can feel the gentle glide of cool skin against the back of his hand, an invitation from the taller man to take his. He does, which earns him a kiss placed upon where they touched. "My brilliant boy. Since meeting you I find myself doing many things out of the ordinary."

The hall opens up to the large lobby, the pair not stopping in their walk even at the sets of eyes that settle on them. "You're peacocking. Trying to show you are strong enough and capable of caring for me." He chuckles at the idea, but knows there is a bead of truth there. "A rather archaic form of courting."

"I too, am rather archaic." He quips.

Will gives the hand in his own a light squeeze as they reach the elevators. "So what's planned for the rest of our day? I'm sure with Mason now under custody there will be an uproar."

The elevator opens and they step inside, the door closing behind them. No one else is on board as Hannibal presses the button for their floor. "And we will not be here to bear witness."

Will's eyes snap to the older man. "Really? We're leaving?" There are many emotions riding along the sound of his voice. Surprise, confusion, and relief.

"Yes, we shall return to our room to grab our belongings and leave. Should all go to plan we should return to Baltimore in time for dinner." He is obviously pleased by the turn of events, but that pleasure drops from his face when his phone rings and he sees the name on the caller ID. "Jack Crawford." He informs Will.

"Put it on speaker?" Will asks, shifting his weight. He is obviously just as displeased.

Hannibal does as asked, answering the phone and placing it on speaker for Will to hear. "Agent Crawford, a pleasure."

"Hello Hannibal. I'm sorry to reach out so suddenly, but we could really use your help here. Have you heard from Will?" The men make eye contact over the phone, resignation crossing Will's features. "Nobody can get ahold of him and when we went to check his house it was trashed and his dogs were gone."

Will lets loose a silent sigh before answering. "I'm here with Hannibal, Jack. My house was ransacked so I've been staying with him."

"Oh! Alright that's good. I'm glad you're safe. Hannibal, how much longer until you will be returning to Baltimore?" There's urgency in his voice, he obviously wants something.

The elevator halts with a click on their floor, both filing out into the hall towards their room. "We are returning to our room to pack our belongings now. We should be back this evening." He answers as they reach their door, opening it quickly and gesturing for Will to enter.

"I want you both here as soon as you get back. We need to have a chat." His voice is grim, Will can picture the scowl on the man's face.

"I will let you know when we land." Hannibal acquiesces as they move towards the bedroom. "Shall I bring Will?"

This earns the man a sideways glance of dismay. "Yes, we need all hands right now."

Will begins to pull out their bags, setting them on the couch, all but ignoring the conversation to begin packing away what they brought with. "Understood. Speak to you soon."

There is a quiet hum before the line ends, earning an exaggerated exhale from the vampire. "Such farewells are hard to find anymore."

Will eyes him with a hint of amusement as he puts the last of his belongings into his bag, living out of it makes it much faster to pack. "Such farewells are rather archaic to most." He teases.

Hannibal pauses where he stands with his hands in a drawer. He had begun to draw clothes from it, but sets them down in favor of turning towards Will. He watches as the vampire approaches, a dark amusement in those maroon orbs. He places a hand on Will's neck, his thumb caressing his jawline. "Perhaps, with the proper tutelage, I can show you the beauty in the archaic ways of life."

Will's breath stutters in his lungs at the touch. He is still far too sensitive to the sensation of intimacy through contact, and Hannibal knows this. As quickly as he approached he pulled away to finish collecting his belongings.

Will takes a breath before joining Hannibal at the dresser, helping to grab items from their neat storage. His voice is quiet as he responds before quickly taking the objects in his hands to the awaiting suitcase.

"What if I already see it?"

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

> Hello everyone! If you are getting a notification for a new chapter, this is just an edit of the same one. A dear friend of mine volunteered to edit it due to some inconsistencies that we both noticed with the chapter, so a big, giant, fantastical thank you to Quietscribe for doing that. Announcement at the end.
>
> Kudos hold Hannibal's hand as he drives.
> Comments stare intently while the boys are being cute.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Their flight seems to pass much faster than their trip in, likely due to the unease he felt the first time. Now, with Hannibal sat close enough next to him that most of their legs are touching, the night sky seems to shift past the window doubly quick. He managed a short nap, but it didn't last long when they hit some turbulence above the Dakotas. Will wouldn't describe himself as a nervous flier, but when the giant metal tube you are hovering in the air in starts to shake, you get a little anxious.

They land with no issue back in Baltimore air space, but he's a bit surprised Jack didn't send anyone to meet them if their presence is as warranted as he made it seem. He always had in the past. Perhaps Jack's simply that short on people that he can't spare them, but either way both of them are equally pleased they aren't going to have to deal with it, only Hannibal's own people, who make themselves useful and scarce. The Bentley is sitting there waiting for them when the plane pulls into their port, their luggage already in the trunk by the time they make their way off, and Will allows himself to merely climb into the passenger seat, too tired to examine how compliant he is at the moment, sighing softly as the car, already running, relieves him of the chill from the evening air.

Once Hannibal gives his thanks to people, and ensures everything is squared, he joins Will in the car, maroon eyes pause to scan over the man next to him. Will can feel that gaze, quietly assessing, lingering as he buckles himself in. Whatever he sees, Hannibal chooses to remain silent until the headlights hit paved roads, yellow lines seeming to carry for miles.

"You are welcome to get some rest on the way there, Will. It will be an hour or so before we arrive." Hannibal suggests, placing warm fingers on Will's limp hand that had been resting between them.

The touch makes him release a huff of breath that temporarily fogs the glass of the window, the cold is coming in fast, before his gaze is drawn to the man beside him. "I'll be alright, if I've survived weeks with nightmares and sleepwalking, I can handle a long day." He can see

the slight displeasure there, visible enough because Hannibal isn't hiding it from him as he might from others, and it's that openness rather than the displeasure itself that has him adding, “Besides, I said I'd call Jack when we landed. I might try for a nap afterwards.”

They both know he probably won't, but despite that, Hannibal takes the cue and pulls his phone from his jacket pocket, passing it easily, the dispute ended before it really started. Honestly, if he couldn't sleep on the plane, he isn't likely to get any sleep now either, no matter how comfortable the heated seats are.

With reluctant fingers he calls Jack, putting the phone on speaker once more. It rings twice, three times, no answer. This puts a frown on both of their faces, and after a couple more rings, he hangs up.

Before either of them can comment, however, the phone trills. It’s from Jack. “ *You’ve landed?* ” He asks, not offering any explanation for the missed call, let alone the lack of his usually more civil greeting to Hannibal.

“Yeah, we just left the airport. About an hour out or so.” Will responds, looking at the dash clock to realize the sun will be coming up soon. He passes a glance at the vampire who doesn’t seem bothered by the idea.

“ *Alright. Be careful on the roads since it’s still dark, there's plenty of those bastards still out there.* ” There is barely contained derision in his voice, stark and angry.

“Of course, Jack, but I doubt they will cause us any problems,” Hannibal speaks, a glint of challenge in his eye as he drives focused on the road. "We aren't intending to stop on the way, and I am sure they have some survival instincts not to attack a moving car." His car especially, Will thinks, seeing the slight crinkling of amusement at the corner of those eyes.

“ *Fine . Just a heads up when you get here. You’re gonna run into extra checks at the door. They figured out you can identify someone who’s infected ‘cause they run cold.* ” Will see’s the vampire eye the phone quickly before returning to the road.

“Thank you, Jack. We will see you when we arrive.” His tone is sharp but still congenial enough not to pass as rude. Will takes the cue and ends the call, not bothering to wait for Jack to respond since he’s unlikely to anyway.

Will watches as Hannibal begins messing with knobs on his dash, pressing buttons and changing settings, not paying too much attention to the actions until the air vents start pumping out more heat into the car.

"The heating? What good will that do?"

“As potentially troublesome as this situation may be, it’s not my first time dealing with mandatory temperature checks. If you could retrieve my coat from the back seat and drape it across the vents in front of you, please. It will keep you from becoming overheated as well as additional heat when I put it on.”

Despite the calm and measured way Hannibal directs him, he can hear the faint tell of aggravation in his voice, although whether it is at the necessary lack of moderate ambient temperature now in the car, or the new knowledge Jack has gained, he doesn't know.

“It is likely," Hannibal continued, "that they will be using contactless thermometers to do the check, and those only test external skin temperature. For a quick one-time test such as this, these measures will allow me to get a close enough temperature to pass.”

“How do you think they figured it out?” Will asks as he wrangles the coat, removing his own jacket as well in preparation for the car becoming more like a sauna.

“I wouldn’t doubt that they have managed to capture one of the freshly turned early on, and have been experimenting. They are likely incapable of finding much more than the basics, ones that my kind have known for a long time.” His eyes remain on the road, navigating through what little traffic there is with the same sort of calm, effortless, ease that he has always had. Despite that, the fission of irritation still lingers in the other man, and Will finds himself taking Hannibal's closest hand in a way that he would never have in the past.

“Is there anything I can do? Would drinking my blood help? Warming you from the inside? I don't know how this works.” His voice is steady but he can feel his face drawn in shades of the concern and anxiety he feels.

His worry earns him a small smile and a squeeze to his hand. “As overjoyed as I am that you would offer your blood so willingly as I hoped you one day would, the amount I would need to warm my body to the required temperature would mean I would drain you. I would rather keep you around a bit longer.”

Will's hand is lifted after the fond understatement, and plush lips press lightly to the knuckles, those eyes spare a glance from the road, playful around the edges once more, before he sets their hands back between them, focusing back on the road once again. “Although my current methods may not be the best, they have served me well in the past.”

He’s silent for a moment, the cool hand in his own, a decided counterpoint to the uncomfortable building heat in the car. It said much that he knows that if he mentioned the growing discomfort, that Hannibal would turn the heating down again, no matter the problematic results of that. He said nothing. He had lived in Louisiana's stifling summers, and he could deal with an inhospitably hot car for an hour. “You aren’t ‘cold’ per se, but you aren’t human warm either.”

“My temperature on average stays about twenty-five degrees Celsius, or seventy-eight degrees Fahrenheit. Depending on how recently I’ve fed it may fluctuate slightly, though I normally keep on a rather regulated schedule. Recently it’s not been exactly standard.” He tosses his gaze towards the human who slowly smirks, memories of their time together in the hotel still rather fresh. before becoming more serious again.

“Is that normal? The seventy-eight degrees I mean,” Will questions, hoping that talking can help ease that increasingly anxious tug in the back of his mind that their meeting and future with the FBI will go poorly if they can't even get in the door.

“For those like me who consistently keep up with their meals, yes, however, different eating habits will affect how their bodies process what they ingest. My meals have been standardized long enough that my body has adapted to those particular habits. It’s a similar process to humans, if you eat at a certain time every day your body will begin to grow hungry around that time, and so much like my hunger, my temperature will remain largely stable,” He explains easily.

“So what about these wild ones then? The ones running around feeding on people left and right? Wouldn’t they be warm then?”

“Yes, they would be a great deal warmer than I, but you would obviously be able to pick those out far more quickly than those like myself. They likely wouldn’t know how to retract their fangs or return their appearance to normal. I have yet to run into any to study for myself, but I have seen fledgelings before, of course.” He gives the vocal equivalent of a shrug, but the knowledge only sits and festers in Will's mind.

"Why are they doing temperature checks for cool skin if the ones that are attacking would be warmer?"

He gets a soft hum in response, and Will can almost feel that complex mind flicking through different thoughts and considerations, although he doesn't doubt that a mind like Hannibal's would already have thought on that.

"I doubt they have been feeding the ones they caught, or at least not well. Especially after indulging to the point of excess and beyond, such a halt of it into famine would cause their body to go into a self-preservation mode that would drop their temperature swiftly to conserve what they have. Try and get some rest, Will. We will find out soon enough."

The conversation brought to a close by those words, the rest of the drive to Quantico is fairly uneventful, though along the way they do see a few wandering souls traveling along the highways likely trying to find a car or a house to hide in with the sun soon rising over the horizon. Hannibal narrows his eyes a bit at the figures when he sees them, but other than that you would never suspect that he might be bothered by it. They arrive just in time for the sky to lighten, birds chirping like the world isn't actually ending, their happy song contrasts horribly with the situation at hand. He supposes for birds, everything is largely the same, it's only humans and vampires whose lives are being turned upside down.

The heater has been running the entire time, Will can feel the sweat on his brow, his shirt clinging to his back, and Hannibal leaves the car running for as long as possible, slipping the coat on while still seated as Will watches.

"Do you think it'll be enough?"

Hannibal offers a small smile of reassurance. "I'm sure it will be fine, Will."

They get out of the car. The night is cold, and the contrast makes him shiver as the sweat swiftly cools, forcing him to pull on his jacket as they walk quickly up the steps and inside to the lobby. The entrance was already marked off with metal detectors and security measures before all of this, ones that Will was used to, the temperature checks only an added step to

make it inside. Beyond the security check area, Will can already see the hurried rush of people swiftly traveling back and forth for different tasks, far more harried than usual. All the stress and rush from people nearby certainly doesn't help his nerves as one of the security officers, in a more militarized uniform than he is used to seeing, steps from the table they had been resting by.

"IDs please." He asks mechanically.

Will pulls out his and shows it to the man, anxiety filling his gut, all too aware of each moment passing when Hannibal's temperature will be decreasing from when he was in the car. This only increases when Hannibal explains that he is here at the request of Jack and that he will need a visitor tag, because the guard doesn't like that answer.

"We are under a lockdown, authorized personnel only." There's no room to budge in his voice, it is flat and unhelpful.

"Call Jack, he will-" Will tries.

"No FBI issued identification, no entrance. Those are the rules."

Will can tell that the guard, for reasons unknown, has taken a dislike to the well dressed man who doesn't have an ID, and the nervous itch under Will's skin is growing with the need to strike out at the delay, and is only increasing each moment they are forced to stand there, putting Hannibal in danger of being found out, especially in a place like this filled with trigger-happy, stressed, people.

It's when Hannibal places a hand on Will's shoulder to get his attention, that the smouldering caldera of Will's nervous anger diffuses, given something other than the guard's anger to focus on.

"It is no matter," Hannibal interjects smoothly, "If I cannot enter, I shall wait in the car until you are done with Jack."

In some ways this is better. A justifiable reason for Hannibal not to get the temperature check done. Will's anxiety only starts to recede when the booming voice interrupts that flow of thought, one recognisable to anyone that regularly works at Quantico.

"Will! Dr. Lecter." Jack is striding forward, and waits until he is on the other side of the security line before speaking once more, likely noticing the tension between Will and the security officer. "What's the hold-up?"

"I'm afraid that, under the FBI's new lockdown policy, I am unable to enter due to a lack of FBI issued identification," Hannibal explains, tone neutral. Will knows that Hannibal would be fine joining the meeting or not, though the idea of leaving Will alone to deal with it after all of their time together would be unpleasant, for the both of them.

"Damn it, let him in! He's one of us," Jack orders, the security guard shooting a glower, and Will could easily see the stubborn set of his shoulders, the tightening of his jaw.

"I am under strict orders by-" The guard starts, his growing yearning for a fight being directed at entirely the wrong person. If not for the anxiety of just being around Jack, Quantico, and the added security that threatened Hannibal's situation, he might have laughed at this poor fool's stupidity.

"You," Jack starts, his volume just short of shaking the walls, "are under strict orders by the FBI to allow our personnel inside. He is one of us. I am ordering you to let him in. Am I understood?"

The guard takes his scolding like a champ considering all of the attention in this half of the building is now focused on him. It's clear he doesn't like it, but he at least knows better than to keep fighting a battle that is already lost. "Yes, sir. But I still need to do the security checks."

"Then quit standing there and do them!" Jack snaps, impatience in every line of his body.

The guard approaches Will, taking the temp on his forehead. After the beep, the guard lowers the gun to glare at Will, then the temperature gun. "Sometimes it doesn't pick up right," the guard mutters, likely all too aware of the thunderous presence of Jack beside them. Will was too, especially with all eyes staring at him in ways he never liked on a good day, let alone one like this. Why would he not read properly? He'd been in the car the same as Hannibal, if anything he should be way over the temperature needed, surely?

"You would have a more accurate reading if you were to scan the neck. Our heads are far more exposed to outside factors which could cause inaccurate results," Hannibal speaks matter of factly, the guard giving him a look, obviously still not liking him right now, especially considering the dressing down he just recieved from Jack.

He tries again on the exposed skin just below Will's jaw and seems to get an answer he likes, waving the reader towards the lobby for Will to pass. Instead of moving on to the metal detector, however, he waits for Hannibal. His eyes must project his concern because Hannibal meets his gaze, calming confidence glinting there.

"I'm glad I was able to help," Hannibal comments placidly as he steps up for his turn, the guard not liking the pollite sounding snark but shrugs it off as Hannibal tilts up his chin, perhaps eager to just get this over and done with, and not have Jack's ire focused upon him any longer than necessary, despite the fact that it's fairly obvious the man would much rather be able to continue to deny him entrance.

Will feels like he's sweating bullets, the lobby mostly quiet still due to the ruckus made by Jack. It feels like everyone is expecting a bad reading, which Will is as well considering how much time has been wasted by arguing with the guard. It seems like it takes forever for the reader to scan, but when that beep comes his stomach drops to his feet.

Until the guard gestures with his head towards the detectors.

Hannibal offers a curt 'Thank you' before moving over to Will who feels like he might go almost boneless at the loss of anxiety and tension from his muscles. "All is well," came the

murmur, pitched low enough to privately placate, eyes showing a glimmer of amusement, before turning his gaze to the other man.

"It's good to see you, Jack," Hannibal says after going through the metal detectors first, his smile charming, just like it always was when around those he wished to think of him as a friend. Will offers a sort of half smile, one that likely comes out more like a grimace; far too aware of Jack's eyes on him, impatient as he gets his jacket caught and fumbles with it before making it through, flustered, even as Hannibal is folding his gloves and putting them in his coat pocket.

"Welcome back," Jack offers as he shakes hands with Hannibal, and then Will. The grip is strong and hot against his skin, and Will is glad Hannibal had been thoughtfully well equipped with those gloves. "Let's go to my office to chat."

Private then, not something Jack wants to chat about even around other FBI. No words are exchanged as they follow the larger man, but the silence is tense. Yes, there is usually a certain level of anxiety when dealing with the headstrong man, but something about this seems different. Still, there's a vast apocalypse style epidemic of vampires going on right now, so it stands to reason Jack is more stressed than usual.

He surreptitiously watches as Jack offers them seats in the office when they arrive, distracted enough that he is barely aware of Hannibal letting him seat himself first before taking his own. Jack is watching them, eyeing every move, and Will has the uncomfortable sensation that maybe the man guesses they haven't exactly been adhering to the doctor-patient rules. For all that Jack tended to rely on Will at crime scenes, the man hadn't gotten to the head of the BSU for nothing, and that could cause Hannibal all sorts of trouble. Assuming that people would even be alive to buy overpriced therapy after all this was over.

It is surreal being back in Jack's office after everything that had gone on. It had only been a week at most since the attack at Wolf Trap, but it felt like his whole world was different now, like his life here working with Jack, of meetings in this office, was a dream, and so finding himself sitting here once more, in the same seats they had first met in, felt disconcertingly odd.

"How was the trip?"

Jack's voice is amiable with a forced friendliness that Will is used to hearing, briefly at least, as a show of thoughtfulness meant to remind someone of that bond in order to make them less likely to refuse whatever it is that Jack wants. *'Look, I'm a friend,'* those words say, *'you wouldn't want to disappoint a friend, would you?'* There's always something Jack wants, at least in Will's case. The questions towards him are always a prelude to asking him to do something Will would really rather not do, and that friendly facade only lasts until Will complies. Sometimes not even then.

Still, the question was mostly aimed at Hannibal, and Jack has always been more pleasant and accommodating when Hannibal was around, no matter that Will still feels those eyes are filled with poorly concealed suspicion upon them. He's probably just paranoid. Even if Jack does suspect they are together as more than doctor and patient, or even as friends, he knows

too that whatever Jack wants will take priority. Jack always ignores things that may prove inconvenient.

"It went well, we accomplished much, though it was short-lived due to everything going on," Hannibal answers easily.

"That's good. So Will, how long have you been without a phone?" Jack asks pointedly. Pleasantries swiftly set aside it seemed; barely even tokenistic. Jack was never good at being patient when something was eating at him. Considering what they were up against, the thought almost made him huff a laugh, managing to catch himself before the inappropriate action condemned him. He sighs instead, running a hand over his face, too damn tired to deal well with Jack's suspicion, his irritation and disappointment, all three things the staple of their interactions.

"Sorry Jack, my house was attacked pretty much right as this started. I've been staying with Hannibal but I haven't really had a chance to get another with the *apocalypse* knocking on our door." He speaks the word with a bit of humor, knowing even as he does that Jack will not find it funny. He can almost feel the ripple of amusement from Hannibal though, but avoids looking to check. He doubts that anything will show on the surface. One of them should keep it together out of the two of them, and Will is only too aware that he is not exactly managing that from his end.

"Well, I'm glad you're safe at least. No issues on the drive here?" Jack asks, his attention turning to the doctor.

"We witnessed a few wanderers, but none made contact of any kind. They seemed to be seeking shelter as the night waned." Hannibal sounds as casual as if he's speaking of light rain outside. "Have the FBI had many issues?" He asks in reference to the entrance, "Your guard was rather well-armed for a man taking temperatures."

Jack sighs. "It's a precaution. Especially during the night, we can't be too cautious. Our personnel is spread so thin as it is. That's why I asked you here."

It's hardly a surprise that Jack wants them for whatever purpose, always utilising whatever tools he feels is in his box, but what with the stress of the entry to the building, and the oddness of once more being shouldered with the pressures that working with Jack entails, its just the heavy exhaustion and frustration that pulls at him.

"With all due respect Jack, what the hell help could we offer with all this? Hannibal doesn't have any fieldwork training or experience, not to mention he lives so far away from here, and I'm a teacher, and I'm pretty sure classes are indefinitely suspended." He scrubs his face in frustration, knowing already that his words won't matter. His words never seem to matter unless they tell Jack things he wants to hear.

As expected, Jack's voice rises, anger and frustration now easily discernible in the room, likely to anyone walking along the corridor too.

"You used to be a cop, Will, you know how the field works and Hannibal is a valuable asset with his medical knowledge. People are dying left and right and soon we won't have enough

remaining to fight off these monsters."

"Monsters?" Hannibal asks in a low tone, pulling the attention away from Will. Jack's head whips to him so fast it's almost like he forgot the man was there. "Are they not human beings Jack? The ones you and I both swore to protect?" Will's eyes focus on Hannibal, wondering where he's going with this. "Are they not just sick? Or has the media been leading the citizens wrong once again?"

Will feels the click like a physical flick to the brain. He's fishing for information, trying to ascertain what they know. "There's always info they don't tell the news, especially if it might cause panic. If you want our help you've gotta give us the whole picture, Jack. What's going on?"

Jack stares at them for a long moment, then seems to come to a decision, grumbling as he reaches into his desk, plopping down a thick folder.

"We've learned a bit from some scientists who got a hold of a few of the original infected from the mall. Honestly, some of the stuff I heard they've been doing is inhumane, but there's a rush for answers that means most people frankly don't care." He haphazardly flips open the folder, turning it to face them and sliding it forward. Both men lean forward to see, Will taking the lead to flip through the pages. "So far we know that they run cold, they have enhanced speed and strength, they heal extremely quickly, and the only way they have found to effectively kill the bastards is to remove the head. That's all I'm worried about."

Will and Hannibal share a look at his words, Will taking the folder to look through while Hannibal keeps Jack occupied. "So you kill them? Is your job not to protect the innocent?"

Will glances up, and Jack is obviously trying to control his ire towards the doctor, a saving grace in Will's book. It's a good thing that he has the folder and his companion is doing the talking. "There is no cure for this… affliction. From what the doctors have found it's not just a token virus that might have a vaccine or cure. They say it's causing a rapid mutation, and within a couple of hours of being bitten they are seeing changes, ones that are irreversible."

Will glances at Hannibal. That's more than he thought they would figure out by now, but Hannibal appears unphased, only a small show of concern on his brows. Honestly, he shouldn't have expected anything else from the man, especially in the presence of others. The concern is feigned, of course. Both of them know the root cause of what's going on.

Looking back to Jack, he sees the man staring at him, and it's been a while since he was the subject of Jack's pointed gaze. As easily as that, he feels pinned by it, sure that every truth and worry that now hides in his mind is being read on his face.

"So what, you plan to just kill them all?" He knows his voice comes out rough and stressed, the pressure of the situation along with Jack's gaze making him sweat more in his jacket. This is worse than he had imagined, if people in charge had given up on doing anything to stop this, other than just deleting them as fast as they were created. His hands had started to tremble at the thought of the sheer number of people that would be slaughtered for no fault of their own, just biology. "I thought we were meant to be saving lives."

Before Jack can insist on an answer there's a loud knock on his office door before it opens quickly to Jimmy and Brian, a laptop open in the older man's hands.

"Jack! You've gotta see this! It's all over the news! All over everywhere!" He exclaims as he rushes into the room with Brian behind him, setting the computer on the desk at an angle they can all see. "Hey Will, Dr. Lecter," He greets, earning responding nods, a brief greeting before turning back to Jack. "You're not gonna believe this."

He presses the spacebar theatrically, the recording of the live stream starting up again.

" *Good morning Baltimore. This morning I have a very special guest here with me who says she has all of the answers to the epidemic spreading across America. She specially requested this interview as soon as possible, requesting this feed be broadcast on as many platforms as possible, and with claims as fantastic as hers how could we refuse? Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier is here with me this morning.* "

Will feels his stomach drop as the camera pans over to the woman sitting confidently next to him. He tries to keep his expression as neutral as possible, but the surprise of seeing her doing what he can only assume to be an exposé about vampire kind glues him to his spot, frozen. Her timing was either perfect, or horrific. He just didn't know which one.

On the laptop, her smile is full of teeth, an obvious show of affection towards the man. " *Thank you so much for having me.* "

Chapter End Notes

So, for a little while now my mental health has not been the best, but it seems lately it's pretty much hit a rock bottom and I am unable to put out chapters that are quality enough to feel like the readers are getting what they deserve. The story has expanded far more than I thought it would and in order to make chapters that are worthy of the story and worthy of my readers I need to take some time off. I would like to see myself posting chapters again around March, but realistically it may not be until more around April depending on how some events in the near future go. I am not abandoning this work, I have too much of a love for the way this world has expanded beyond what I could have imagined to simply let it go. Thank you all who have been persistently following the story, your comments and love give me life and I hope that when I return I can bring you words that will do the same to you. Much love ❤️❤️❤️.

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